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THE INDYPENDENT

Issue #76, September 14 – October 4, 2005

**a FREE paper
for free people**



PHOTO: AndrewStern.net

GATHERING RAGE

Mass destruction in New Orleans, Government to Blame

One million displaced • Victims treated like criminals •

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Media manipulation • The NYC Grassroots Responds •

Hidden Heroics • The 'Right of Return' & much more



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WHAT IS INDYMEDIA?

With autonomous chapters in more than 120 cities throughout the world, the Independent Media Center is an international network of volunteer media activists.

The IMC seeks to create a new media ethic by providing progressive, in-depth and accurate coverage of issues. We are a community-based organization using media to facilitate political and cultural self-representation. We seek to analyze issues affecting individuals, communities and ecosystems by providing media tools and space to those seeking to communicate. We espouse open dialogue and placing the means of communication and creativity back in the hands of the people, away from the drive of profit.

The Independent is funded by benefits, subscriptions, donations, grants and ads from organizations and individuals with similar missions.

WHAT CAN I DO TO GET INVOLVED?

The IMC has an open door. You can write and distribute for *The Independent*, videotape events and rallies, update the website, self-publish articles to the web, take photos or just help us run the office. As an organization relying on volunteer support, we encourage all forms of participation.

The print team reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity. We welcome your participation in the entire editorial process.

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR september



The New York City Independent Media Center
needs a new office after November. *If you can help*, please call:
212.684.8112, or email imc-nyc@indymedia.org

SAT SEPT 17

7pm • FREE
READING: MARTHA ACKELSBERG
FREE WOMEN OF SPAIN
Free Women Of Spain: Anarchism And The Struggle For The Emancipation Of Women has been reissued.
Bluestockings
172 Allen St. btw. Stanton and Rivington

SAT/SUN SEPT 17 & 18

10am – 5pm • FREE
FALL IN LOVE WITH PROSPECT PARK!
Learn about the Park's avian residents, step back into colonial history and volunteer to help clean-up Brooklyn's only freshwater lake. Events at the Lefferts Historic House, the Prospect Park Audubon Center and around the park. Call (718) 965-8999 for info

2pm • FREE
BICYCLE WELDING WORKSHOP & SKILLSHARE
49 E. Houston St. (Btw. Mott & Mulberry)
Sponsored by Times Up!

10pm • FREE
HISTORY, MYSTERY, MURDER AND MONEY TOUR
Sponsored by Times Up!
Manhattan entrance to the Brooklyn Bridge (southwest corner of Chambers and Centre Street/Park Row). BYO Bicycle

SUN SEPT 18

2 - 6pm • FREE
3RD ANNUAL WEST SIDE COUNTY FAIR
At Riverside Park South, enter at the Hudson River at W. 68th or W. 72nd Sts.
www.nyc.gov/parks

4pm • FREE
KNITTING: DYKE KNITTING CIRCLE RETURNS!
Come on in and knit, make new friends, drink some tea and learn a new craft at a self-help and member led group event. The Dyke Knitting Circle is open to all levels of experience and meets every 3rd Sunday of the month. Please bring yarn and knitting needles, and feel free to contact the DKC at knittingcirlenyc@yahoo.com or (212) 714-8375 with questions.
Bluestockings
172 Allen St. btw. Stanton and Rivington

MON/TUES SEPT 19 & 20

8pm • FREE
G8 2005 SCREENING AND REPORT BACK
A screening of NYC Indymedia footage from the 2005 G8 protests at the Times Up! space at 49 E. Houston St. The screening will be followed by a report back from individuals who attended the protests and an update on actions planned for the September 24th protests in Washington, DC.
49 E. Houston St.

7pm • \$9 (\$6.50 Students)
THE WOODSTOCK FILM FESTIVAL PRESENTS *HARSH BEAUTY* (dir. Alessandra Zeka)
This films follows the lives of three Eunuchs who live as women in India, as they struggle to find a place for themselves in a culture splintered by religion, caste and politics.
Pioneer Theater, 155 East 3rd Street
(212) 591-0434

6 - 8pm • FREE
IS WAL-MART GOOD FOR AMERICA?
(Is there really a debate?) Sponsored by Metropolitan College of New York
12th Fl. Student Lounge - 75 Varick St.
(212) 343-1234 X 3208

SEPT WED 21

8:30am – 3pm • Sliding scale
MEET THE GRANTMAKERS: NEW STRATEGIES IN GRANTMAKING
Sponsored Support Center for Nonprofit Management
Continental breakfast and lunch will be provided. Contact Steve at (212) 924-6744, ext. 302 or sd@supportctr.org.
Con Edison, 4 Irving Place

7pm • \$9 (\$6.50 Students)
Woodstock Film Festival presents THE AVERAGE AMERICAN
A documentary film that introduces the viewer to 100 "ordinary Americans" who roughly reflect the population of the U.S. (according to the 2000 U.S. Census) with regards to age, race, gender, and state of residence.
Pioneer Theater, 155 East 3rd St.
(212) 591-0434

THURS SEPT 22 – SAT SEPT 24

9:30am – 6:30pm • FREE
A REFUGEE CAMP IN THE HEART OF THE CITY
A traveling interactive exhibit returns to New York City! Learn what it's like to live as one of the 33 million refugees worldwide who have been uprooted by war. Enter the refugee camp and explore real shelters, see how food and water are distributed, taste the emergency food that is used to combat malnutrition, learn how basic sanitation and health care are essential to survival, and hear the stories of former refugees.
Central Park, Manhattan: Cherry Hill at 72nd St.

SAT/SUN/MON SEPT 24, 25, 26 NATIONAL PROTEST AGAINST THE WAR IN IRAQ

SAT SEPT 24

10am All-Day Peace & Justice Festival Begins, Washington Monument
11:30am Rally at Ellipse
12:30pm March steps off
3pm "Operation Ceasefire" Concert & Rally featuring Cindy Sheehan, Musicians include Ted Leo and The Pharmacists, Le Tigre, Bouncing Souls, country music recording artist Steve Earle, socially conscious hip hop groups like The Coup, the rock 'n soul group The Bellrays, along with progressive activists/performers Head-Roc, Jello Biafra, Wayne Kramer of the MC5 and many others for a free concert on the Washington Monument grounds.

SUN 25

6pm Interfaith "Tent Revival" for Peace and Justice: Washington Monument Grounds

MON 26

All Day United for Peace and Justice Lobby Day: meet with legislators and their staffs to urge them to stand up against the war. The goal is to have 600 people meet with 100 Congressional Representatives. To participate, you must register at unitedforpeace.org

SAT 24

3pm • FREE
SAT PEDAL POWER FOR PEACE – A BIKE RIDE

In solidarity with the march for peace in Washington D.C. we will ride our bikes through Queens! Clean transportation demonstrates our independence from oil, the real reason behind the War in Iraq, and our commitment to non-violence. The Green Market is fabulous and a great place to get fresh fruits and veggies to help pedal through the afternoon. Vernon Blvd. & 48th Ave. in Long Island City (LIC Green Market)

6:30pm • FREE
LADIES BICYCLE REPAIR NIGHT
Sponsored by Times Up!
49 E. Houston St. (between Mott and Mulberry)

TUE SEPT 27

7:30pm • \$10
AFTER WAR... FILM SERIES
Three years after the atomic bomb, Mitsue, a guilt-ridden Hiroshima survivor, spars with her father's lively ghost, who insists she try her chance at happiness with an attractive suitor. Featuring a trio of Japan's finest actors, the film deftly tackles the fundamental questions of how to survive and remember catastrophes of war. film@japansociety.org or call (212) 715-1216 333 East 47th St.

4pm - 5:30pm • FREE
(reservations required)
NONPROFITS AND THE LAW:
START UP BASICS
Speaker: Sonia Jarvis, Ackerman Chair & Associate Professor. Sponsored by The Nonprofit Group, The School of Public Affairs at Baruch College, CUNY. RSVP by phone at 212-802-2988. 135 East 22nd St. 3rd Floor, Room 301

SEPT WED 28 – OCT 2

9:30am – 6:30pm • FREE
A REFUGEE CAMP IN THE HEART OF THE CITY
See description above
Prospect Park, Bklyn: Long Meadow – Grand Army Plaza entrance.

ONGOING EVENTS

GRANDMOTHERS AGAINST THE WAR
Every Wed. 4:30 – 5:30 pm
We're in the 15th month of our vigil in front of Rockefeller Plaza on Fifth Avenue. Please join us – all people are welcome – young and old.

special

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OFFER

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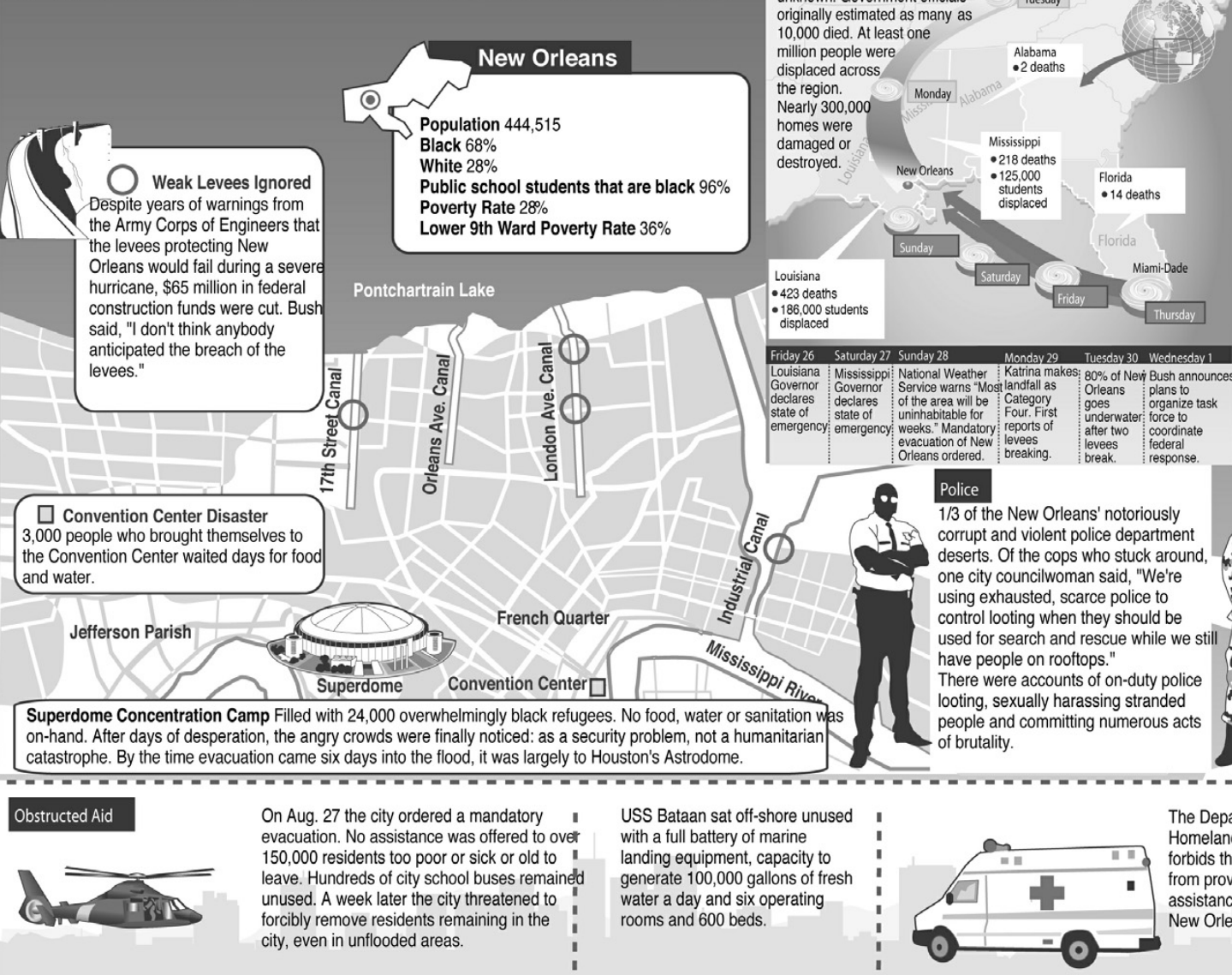
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NEW ORLEANS: EVERYTHING WENT WRONG



Indifference at the Highest Levels of Government

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice shopped for shoes, took in a Broadway show and watched the U.S. Open tennis tournament on the fourth day of the crisis.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld spent Monday night (Aug. 29) hanging out in the owner's box at a San Diego Padres game.

As the whole Gulf Coast flooded, George Bush played guitar with a country music star before returning to his Texas ranch to finish his vacation.

HURRICANE KATRINA: THE HORROR

Thousands dead – One million people displaced – It didn't have to happen, but it did.

BY MIKE BURKE

Three days before Katrina hit, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco declared a state of emergency. A day later Mississippi followed suit.

Soon the mayor of New Orleans ordered a mandatory evacuation, with no steps taken beyond the proclamation. More than 100,000 people stayed behind: the poor, the sick, the old and children, all predominantly African-American.

By Sunday, Aug. 28, the horrifying scope of the storm became clear. The National Weather Service warned, "Most of the area will be uninhabitable for weeks ... perhaps longer." A second warning read, "Preparations to protect life and property should be completed this evening... some levees in the greater New Orleans could be overtopped."

Unfortunately, President Bush missed the warning. He told ABC after the flooding: "I don't think anybody anticipated the breach of the levees."

When the storm made landfall Monday morning, New Orleans was hit hard, but the Mississippi cities of Gulfport and Biloxi were devastated. However, the trouble for New Orleans was just beginning, as the levees began to give way. By Tuesday, two levees had collapsed. Within hours 80 percent of the city was under water.

According to *Time*, on the day the storm hit, Governor Blanco called the White House and demanded to speak to the President, but he could not be located. She then asked for Chief of Staff Andrew Card, who was on vacation. Hours later, she got Bush on the phone and he vowed, "Help is on the way."

But most of the help was days away.

After the storm hit, Michael Brown, then head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), requested that the Department of Homeland Security dispatch

1,000 employees over the next 48 hours to the region.

The National Guard was understaffed and slow to respond: 40 percent of Mississippi's force and 35 percent of Louisiana's was in Iraq.

Lt. Gen. Steven Blum, chief of the National Guard Bureau, told CNN that "arguably" a day or so of response time was lost due to the absence of the troops in Iraq.

There was little sense of urgency in the federal government's response. Offers of help were initially ignored or rejected. The hospital facilities aboard the *USS Bataan* went unused, even though it was in the Gulf of Mexico and had doctors, hospital beds, food and water.

One thousand firefighters volunteered to help, but FEMA sent them to Atlanta for classes in sexual harassment. Cuba had 1,100 doctors who were ready to be deployed the day after the levees broke. The Bush administration refused Cuba's offer of assistance.

The Florida Airboat Association offered to send in 500 trained volunteer pilots to help rescue hurricane victims.

The Red Cross was barred from even entering New Orleans.

Meanwhile, the residents were wondering if they had been forgotten.

Thousands remained trapped in attics on rooftops. Hospitals were losing power and running out of medical supplies, food and water.

Tens of thousands filled the Superdome and were living in subhuman conditions. Food and water quickly ran out. The toilets stopped working. Corpses lay unattended.

"We were treated like this was a concentration camp," Audrey Jordan told *Agence France Presse*.

Two EMS workers reported that armed sheriffs barred scores of people from crossing a bridge over the Mississippi River. The sheriffs said they didn't want the West Bank suburbs to become New Orleans. They fired shots to reinforce their point.

Outside, corpses were floating in the flood-water and lying on the city streets. And the images were being broadcast around the world.

On CNN, Anderson Cooper reported he had seen a body being eaten by rats.

On NBC, photojournalist Tony Zumbada reported from the Convention Center: "There's nothing offered to them, no water, no ice, no C-rations. Nothing for the last four days."

In the corridors of power, the focus shifted from saving the victims to targeting them. On the state level, Governor Blanco issued an order to "shoot to kill" looters, even though many of the so-called looters were starving residents seeking food and water.

Brig. Gen. Gary Jones, commander of the Louisiana National Guard's Joint Task Force, told the *Army Times*, "This will be a combat operation to get this city under control." He compared New Orleans to a "little Somalia." Mercenaries from Blackwater eventually took to the street.

In Washington, the *New York Times* reported that President Bush's chief advisor Karl Rove began plotting a PR campaign to shift blame to local and state officials. Soon "the blame game" became the GOP catchword of choice. Meanwhile, the people kept dying.

New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin sent a "desperate SOS" for more aid. "Help Us, Please," read a banner headline in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*. A mandatory evacuation of the city was ordered.

Plans were hatched to bus everyone in the Superdome to other locales. But even those plans went awry. Thousands were left stranded outside the stadium – or in some cases on the highway – waiting for buses.

Many hurricane survivors tried leaving on their own and were blocked by police.

Two emergency medical services workers, Larry Bradshaw and Lorrie Beth Slonsky, reported that armed sheriffs barred scores of people from crossing a bridge out of the city.

The sheriffs said they didn't want the West Bank suburbs to become New Orleans, and that there would be no Superdomes in their city. The sheriffs fired shots to reinforce their point.

"These were code words for: if you are poor and Black, you are not crossing the Mississippi River, and you are not getting out of New Orleans," the medics wrote.

The future of New Orleans and the region is now in doubt. More than one million people from the Gulf Coast have been displaced.

The *Wall Street Journal* reports that the city's white elite has already begun plotting how to redevelop the city. One Republican congressman was overheard telling lobbyists, "We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did."

Halliburton and Bechtel are scoring reconstruction contracts.

Environmentalists warn that the long-term ecological toll could be devastating. Hugh Kaufmann, a longtime official at the Environmental Protection Agency says toxic chemicals in the New Orleans floodwaters could make the city unsafe for full human habitation for a decade.

The number of deaths may never be known. Initially, officials predicted that as many as 10,000 had died (FEMA had 25,000 body bags on hand), but, in one of the few glimmers of hope, the official death toll as we went to press was far lower.

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH:

Kat Aaron, Jed Brandt, Josh Breitbart, Leijia Hanrahan & Ana Nogueira

Overkill:

Blackwater Mercenaries Deploy in New Orleans

BY JEREMY SCAHILL AND DANIELA CRESPO

NEW ORLEANS—Mercenaries from Blackwater USA, infamous for their work in Iraq, are openly patrolling the streets of New Orleans carrying M-16s and other assault weapons.

Some of the mercenaries say they have been “deputized” by the Louisiana governor; some are wearing state law-enforcement badges on their chests and Blackwater photo identification cards on their arms. They say they are under contract to the federal Department of Homeland Security and have been given the authority to use lethal force. Several mercenaries we spoke with said they had served in Iraq on the personal security details of the former head of the U.S. occupation, L. Paul Bremer, and the former U.S. ambassador to Iraq, John Negroponte.

“This is a totally new thing to have guys like us working CONUS (Continental United States),” a heavily armed Blackwater mercenary told us as we stood on Bourbon Street in the French Quarter. “We’re much better equipped to deal with the situation in Iraq.”

Some of the men now patrolling the streets of New Orleans returned from Iraq as recently as two weeks ago.

Blackwater is one of the leading private “security” firms servicing the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. It has several U.S. government contracts and has provided security for many senior U.S. diplomats, foreign dignitaries and corporations. The company rose to international prominence after four of its men were killed in Fallujah in March 2004, with the charred bodies of two of them hung from a bridge. Those killings sparked the U.S. destruction of Fallujah.

The city of New Orleans has been confiscating legally registered weapons from civilians. Police Commissioner Eddie Compass claims that “only law enforcement are allowed to have weapons.”

Officially, Blackwater says its forces are in New Orleans to “join the Hurricane Relief Effort.” A statement on the company’s website, dated Sept. 1, advertises airlift services, security services and crowd control. The company, according to news reports, has since begun taking private contracts to guard hotels, businesses and other properties. But two Blackwater mercenaries told us they are actually engaged in general law-enforcement activities, including “securing neighborhoods” and “confronting criminals.”

A spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security told the *Washington Post* he knew of no federal plans to hire Blackwater or other private security.

“This is a trend,” one mercenary said. “You’re going to see a lot more guys like us in these situations.”

OH NO THEY DIDN'T

The things people say when they just don't give a damn

“They have M-16s and they're locked and loaded. These troops know how to shoot and kill, and they are more than willing to do so, and I expect they will.”



LOUISIANA GOVERNOR KATHLEEN BLANCO, referring to 300 National Guard troops who landed in New Orleans fresh from the occupation of Iraq.

“This place is going to look like Little Somalia. We're going to go out and take this city back. This will be a combat operation to get this city under control.”



BRIGADIER GENERAL GARY JONES, the commander of the Louisiana National Guard's Joint Task Force said as hundreds of armed troops under his charge prepared to launch a massive citywide security mission.

“What I'm hearing, which is sort of scary, is they all want to stay in Texas... So many of the people in the arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway – so this is working very well for them.”



FORMER FIRST LADY BARBARA BUSH said without even the slightest hint of irony.

NYC Grassroots Gets the Aid Out

BY DAMALI ABRAMS

Disgusted by the lack of response by FEMA and other governmental organizations, grassroots groups have taken the lead to organize relief for victims.

In New York, the Universal Hip Hop Parade and Critical Resistance are organizing food, water and resources to take to affected regions. Grassroots Artists Movement (GAME) is conducting a drive throughout the four boroughs and New Jersey. R.E.A.C.Hip-Hop held a candlelight vigil at Union Square on Sept. 4. The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement quickly mobilized a donation drive that brought in nearly a ton of needed supplies.

Hip-Hop writer and activist Kevin Powell sponsored a rap concert Sept. 1 at the Canal Room featuring artists GAME and Brand Nubian in front of a crowd of 150. The donations collected filled one tractor trailer. According to John Kim, an organizer with the Hip Hop Political Conference “[We] were scrambling to locate another 18-wheeler. But then a most amazing thing happened. A black brother happened to pass by... It turned out that he was a truck driver and owned an 18-wheeler in his driveway... We ended up filling three-quarters of this second rig.”

Palestinian poet Suheir Hammad organized a benefit reading called “Refugee to Refugee” building upon the common parallels of Palestinians and those displaced by the hurricane, including the right of return. Some \$4,000 was raised and was donated to the People’s Hurricane Fund.

The People’s Hurricane Fund has established headquarters in Jackson, Mississippi. In

media madness

Black and White in Living Color

BY CHRIS ANDERSON

After Hurricane Katrina, close readers of the news could be forgiven for feeling a sense of schizophrenia. The devastation jolted many of TV’s talking heads out of their slick circus acts, turning them into something resembling real journalists. At the same time, many media outlets utterly failed to grasp the magnitude of the disaster, falling back on platitudinous hand wringing and racist, classist clichés.

The news media thrive on turning random, discrete events into coherent, recognizable narratives (hurricane approaches, Doppler radar spins, correspondents clutch their rain ponchos as palm trees bend in the background, storm ends, help arrives) but the “normal hurricane story” took a terrible turn for the worse.

With the usual narrative crushed under the inescapable reality of sheer human misery in the Crescent City, some media personalities rose to the occasion, if only for a moment.

All Things Considered host Robert Siegel sounded like Amy Goodman when he forced Homeland Security chief Michael Chertoff to admit that he didn’t even know there were thousands of refugees stranded at the New Orleans Convention Center.

Anderson Cooper interrupted pontificating Louisiana Sen. Mary Landrieu on CNN, saying, “Senator, I’m sorry. For the last four days, I have been seeing dead bodies here in the streets of Mississippi and to listen to politicians thanking each other and complimenting each other – I have to tell you, there are people here who are very upset and angry.”

The fact that such examples of journalistic spine are even noteworthy says much about the debased state of the news.

Then, less than two weeks after the storm



BLAMING BUSH: Activists with *WorldCantWait.org* hold a New Orleans-style jazz funeral in Union Sqare. One participant was arrested. PHOTO: rogouski.com

addition to providing immediate relief for survivors, it has called for the rebuilding of New Orleans based on accountability to the displaced community. “The people of New Orleans will not go quietly into the night... while federal relief funds are funneled into rebuilding casinos, hotels, chemical plants and the wealthy white districts of New Orleans like the French Quarter and the Garden District” said Curtis Muhammad, spokesman for Community Labor United.

Organizers have tied the current relief

efforts to larger issues of social justice. Kamau Franklin, an attorney and organizer with the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement sees many lessons to be garnered from Katrina. “[We need to have] structures in place to bring relief to the masses of our people, that means having centers where community organizing happens on a daily basis, providing schooling, recreational activities, employment, housing. The lesson is learning how to gather resources and to create institutions that distribute power to people because that’s the next step.”



hit, a crackdown on media coverage began. Inside the Houston Astrodome, where information about conditions was hard to come by, widely supported efforts to set up a low-power FM station were blocked by local bureaucrats. As criticism mounted of the government’s emergency response system, FEMA pressured the media not to show dead bodies in the region. Numerous reports of police violence against “unembedded” journalists in New Orleans emerged, making this story resemble the other Gulf war.

The fact that a few individual anchors asked a few minutes’ worth of tough questions hardly counterbalances the utterly racist tenor of the initial coverage of Hurricane Katrina, especially in New York City’s tabloid press.

Much of the written coverage of Katrina prior to Sept. 1 had little to say about the race or class of the victims. By the morning of

Sept. 2, however, media outlets were talking about it – all in the context of looting.

On the cover of the *New York Daily News*, a sea of black hands could be seen assaulting the body of an injured white man with the headline “ANARCHY,” while the *New York Post* presented readers with the picture of heavily armed white troops aiming their weapons at a crowd of African-Americans.

When the government announced a shoot-to-kill policy on looters, most of the media not only didn’t question it, but backed the government’s position that looting posed one of the biggest threats.

Most likely, the press will soon start to treat the New Orleans disaster as just another story, turning what has been a massive failure of the U.S. capitalist system into a partisan political dispute, and once again ignoring the deep inequities that made the debacle inevitable.



*"Wade in the water, Wade in the water, children
God's gonna trouble the waters"*

The Act of Healing Is in the Trouble

BY KAZEMBE BALAGUN

Beneath the charges of incompetence lies the fact that America always hated us. Before Katrina, black children in the Ninth Ward were malnourished and older people died lonely deaths. It took a deluge to wash away the lie of this country's benevolent democracy.

Now we have to deal with the truth.

The initial response by people of conscience was silence. Not the absence of words, but the frantic quietude of habit. Protesters shouted and were arrested, emer-

gency meeting minutes were duly noted and the root causes were, of course, explored.

A jewel of a city is submerged and its people displaced. The raw racism of the state was revealed and the weight of it is real. We must ask: Who will take the weight? We must answer: What happens now depends solely on us. After the silence comes the scream.

Every bus and boat liberated to transport victims, every piece of food shared and benefit organized is a new humanity in bloom. History teaches us that liberation begins when we accept our own dignity. The last

time black folks waded troubled waters was when Bull Connor turned fire hoses on children. And they danced. A nation, lulled to sleep by calm waters, bore witness and awoke.

Survival is not life. Political bickering and pained rhetoric must be replaced with visions of a future in plain sight. The aid networks begun by Katrina should be expanded to build daycare centers, collective kitchens, libraries, clinics, gardens and housing. We must have the courage to dream against the nightmare.

The trouble waters face us. We must step in and wade.

Collecting Food, Gathering Rage

The atrocity of New Orleans is what white supremacy looks like. From atop a mountain of black corpses, television demagogues will say that this "isn't about race." But the proof is in the pudding, not what's written on the package.

BY JED BRANDT

While the government turned on the overwhelmingly black victims of Hurricane Katrina as if they were the problem, local residents took food, water and clothing to make it through the floods. They were treated as criminals to be contained, called animals for the very desperation they endured. Wild and unsubstantiated stories of wanton rape echoed old Southern tales of white women in danger, and the black skin of the victims was supposed to blind us to their manifest suffering.

When the Army Corps of Engineers warned that the city's protective levees couldn't withstand a severe hurricane, they were ignored. Not one of the politicians making that decision even needed to say why. It's not about race, just so long as it's rich white people making decisions about poor black lives. Government incompetence and bureaucratic corruption were hidden behind outlandish exaggerations of attacks on rescue workers as federal officials literally turned away aid and left tens of thousands stranded for days without food, fresh water or toilets at the Superdome. And then, when the troops were

finally marshalled, they came "locked and loaded" to menace the survivors. A jail was hastily constructed out of the same Greyhound bus station that failed to evacuate residents with nowhere to go, who were too poor to own cars. The same troops who leveled Falluja were brought in to protect property while men and women, old people and children were literally dying in the flooded ghettos.

There are heroes to this story, but they don't have titles of responsibility and power. In small towns and big cities, everyday people collected food, assembled their cars into impromptu supply convoys and headed down to New Orleans. And a brave few, such as Kanye West, said the plain truth: "George Bush doesn't care about black people." He didn't need a cue card to know what he had to say.

The problem is bigger than Bush, even if his smug indifference puts an ugly face on the deeper reality. White supremacy is the creaking spine of America.

It must be said plainly: Black people were brought to this country in chains. They picked the cotton and built the roads. Black women nannied the children of privilege, and endured the subterranean vices of puritan

longing. In the aftermath of slavery, African-Americans were turned into share-croppers on the old plantations and wage slaves in the cities. When basic civil rights were wrested from the white power establishment, literally nothing was done to end the systematic economic and social subordination of black people as a people. Welfare and prisons regulated the masses, while about one in five "made it" into the middle class. Black people never got their 40 acres and a mule. Instead of hating poverty, this system taught us to hate the poor — to hate ourselves. To fear.

There is blame to go around. But no shuffling of chairs at the table of power can whitewash this crime. There will be blue-ribbon panels and partisan acrimony, the television buzz will turn bodies in the street into talking points and "policy imperatives," as surely as the Kerner Commission met a generation ago to dissipate the anger that burned city after city in righteous rage.

They lied us into war. They manipulate our fears and turn us against each other. There is an us and a them.

Let it be said in all clarity that this is not our government. It does not serve us or work for us or care about our lives. It serves only one master whose name is money.

The same people who collected food for the suffering are now gathering rage. Another hurricane is coming, this one made of flesh and blood, and breathing fire.

The Failures of Black Leadership

BY KAZEMBE BALAGUN

The Katrina disaster exposed the faultlines within the black political establishment. That establishment, composed of civil-rights organizations and black politicians with roots in the civil-rights era, has been on the defensive since the 2000 Florida voting scandal that gave George Bush the White House. (Bush has refused to meet with the Congressional Black Caucus and the NAACP.) And it is being challenged by the rise of black conservatives, particularly the evangelical Christian groups that receive federal funding under "faith-based grants."

The black establishment that rose under the banner of economic equality and social justice has also abandoned mass-based movements in favor of "representational politics" that seek a seat at the corporate table. Black leadership's lukewarm reaction to the disaster reflected those ties to corporations and the overall power structure.



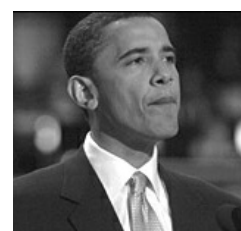
1) New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin was cheered by many for his vocal criticism of FEMA's handling of the Katrina crisis. However, Nagin was formerly a Republican and contributed to **George W. Bush's** 2000 election campaign. He only switched party lines to run for mayor, after which he promptly opposed a living-wage bill.

2) National Action Network chair and former presidential candidate **Al Sharpton** responded by comparing



the rapid response to last year's hurricanes in Florida with the slow response to Katrina. Still, the very week of the Katrina disaster, NAN was slated to give awards to **Walmart** and **Tyson Foods**. Both companies are being sued for violating the civil rights of their minority workers.

3) With charges of racism filling the media, Bush quickly sought to deflect criticism. Secretary of State **Condoleezza Rice** was dispatched to speak to a black Baptist church, while conservative black preacher **T.D. Jakes** held a summit with Bush and Operation Blessing led by 700 Club founder **Pat Robertson**. Jakes, a recipient of federal grants for prisoner outreach, called for "faith-based initiatives" for Katrina victims.



4) The **Congressional Black Caucus** criticized FEMA's slow response, yet held back on charges of racism. "There's been much attention in the press about the fact that those who were left

behind in New Orleans were disproportionately poor and African American." **Senator Barack Obama** (D-Ill.) said in a statement. "I've said publicly that I do not subscribe to the notion that the painfully slow response of FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security was racially based. The ineptitude was color-blind."

5) Long the go-to guy for optimistic platitudes in the face of black catastrophe, **Jesse Jackson's** contribution was to complain about the word "refugees" in describing the refugees from the floods.





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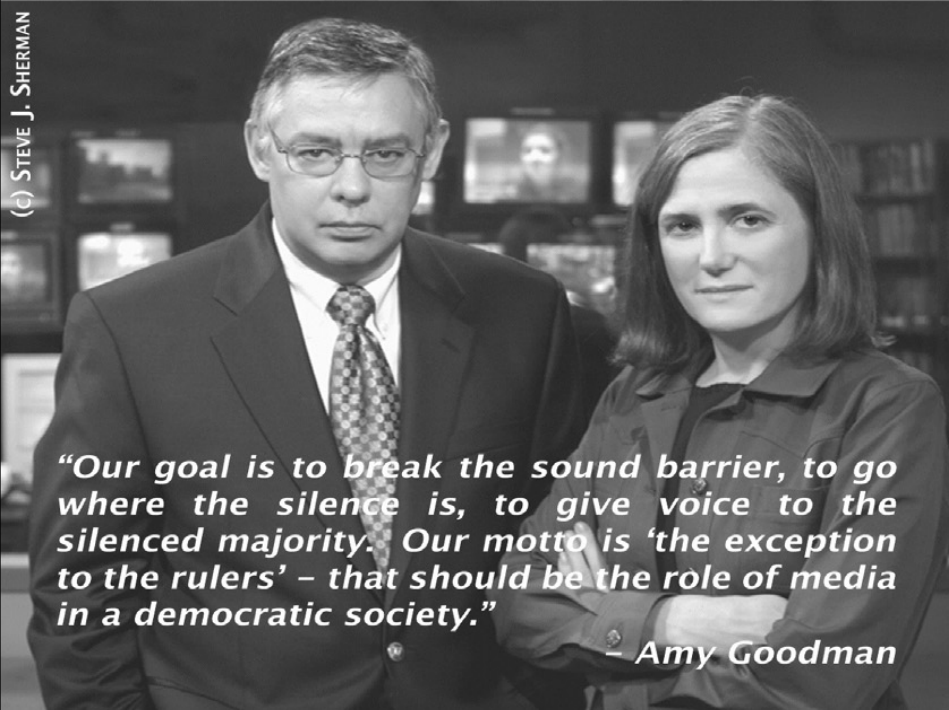
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It's All Connected

It's all connected: the hurricane, Iraq, racism, global warming, a credulous media, a corrupt government, greedy corporations, a militarized society, a bitterly divided America.

Starkest were the parallels with the disaster of Iraq. First was the White House's blithe assertion that "no one could have predicted" the levees would break: The prospect that a powerful hurricane would ravage New Orleans was as predictable as the possibility that the occupation of Iraq would turn into a bloody insurgency.

BY A.K. GUPTA

In both Gulfs, the Bush administration gave little thought to the consequences. Iraq was war on the cheap; New Orleans was lost for the want of a few million. This fiscal year, the Bush administration offered only 15 percent of the Army Corps of Engineers' request for \$27 million to reinforce the levees surrounding Lake Pontchartrain.

The corps delayed seven contracts, and one Louisiana official observed, "It appears that the money [for strengthening levees against hurricanes] has been moved in the president's budget to handle homeland security and the war in Iraq."

Yet always alert to spin gold from tragedy, the President's friends are cashing in. Three early winners in the gargantuan Gulf Coast reconstruction — Halliburton, Bechtel and Fluor — have made away with billions of dollars from "rebuilding" Iraq. Halliburton, with a little help from former FEMA chief Joe Allbaugh, landed a \$500 million contract on Sept. 1.

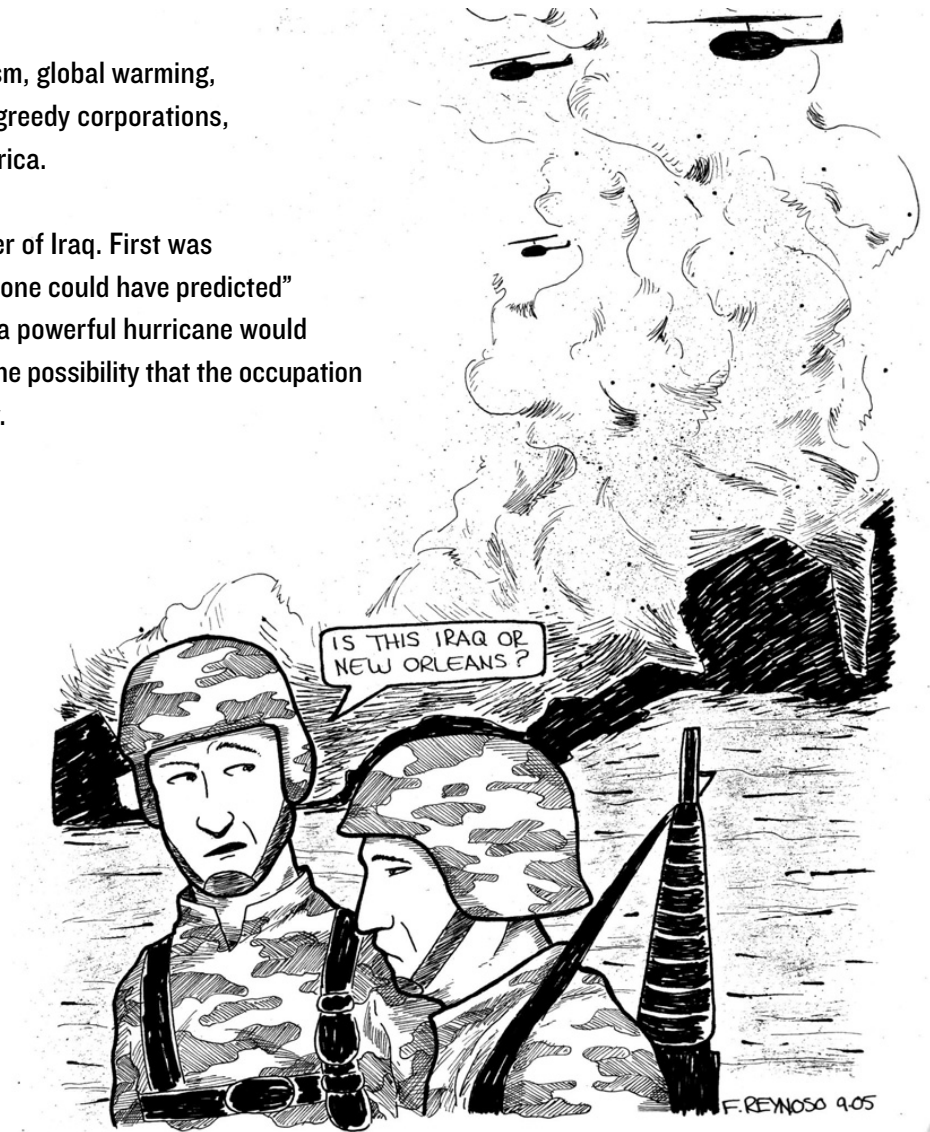
This rank cronyism is symptomatic of a corrupt administration where loyalty and connections are all that matter. It's not just incompetence, however. The murder of New Orleans was the direct result of the "drown the government in the bathtub" philosophy and its depraved indifference to human life. Thousands of people drowned in a bathtub called New Orleans.

New Orleans also got a dose of Iraq-style military occupation. The checkpoints, SWAT teams, armored personnel carriers, house-to-house searches for guns and dusk-to-dawn curfews snuck in on rumors masquerading as fact.

The media-hyped stories of mayhem were dismissed quietly. Police told the *London Guardian*, "We don't have any substantiated rapes," while military and civilian officials cast doubt on a widely circulated report that shots were fired at a rescue helicopter outside a hospital on Aug. 31. In many recorded instances, survivors were held at gunpoint at police checkpoints and treated as prisoners in purgatorial holding camps.

The media played along with the stagecraft — broadcasting shots of a concerned Bush peering out of the window of Air Force One that "detoured" (how he must have been inconvenienced on his vacation). Few dead bodies made it onto television, as FEMA urged the media not to show them — just as the Pentagon tries to censor images of dead Americans from Iraq.

As for the looting that recalled the fall of Baghdad, never mind that most were scrounging supplies to survive or commandeering vehicles to flee. And the world now knows, as the captions of two strikingly similar photos described it, that black people



"loot" for groceries while white people "find" groceries.

Treating desperate survivors as criminals was just one facet of a lethal racism. We may never know how many people died because search-and-rescue operations were suspended to uphold the sanctity of private property. And to deny that race was a factor when thousands of African-Americans were crying out for help on national television is not to be color-blind but reality-blind.

They are also blind to the reality of an America polarized between the filthy rich and the dirt-poor.

Then again, this administration is famous for stating, "We create our own reality" — a reality that denies the link between global warming and extreme weather or that destroying Louisiana's wetlands would lead to more devastating storm surges. And it will try to deny the damaging effects of pumping billions of gallons of toxic stew into the Gulf of Mexico. After all, Bush's Environmental Protection Agency covered up the health disaster from Sept. 11, and, in the words of one EPA official, "The budget has been cut and inept political hacks have been put in key positions."

The next task is the official whitewash, with Bush declaring, "I'll lead an investigation of what went right and what went wrong." But just as Hurricane Ivan last year should have been all the warning we needed, Katrina portends the next Republican-led apocalypse — whether it comes from the incompetence of ideologues or the blindness of fanatics.

It might be in the form of nuclear weapons — the Joint Chiefs of Staff are recommending the *preemptive* use of nuclear weapons. Based on the slipshod, politically driven intelligence services, it seems the perfect strategy for igniting a global holocaust.

Or it could be avian flu. Few take notice, but the virus has jumped the species barrier

repeatedly and has the potential to kill millions of humans. Instead of aggressively addressing the threat, the Bush administration is diverting funds to "bioterrorism" to research obscure diseases that pose virtually no danger to humans.

It's all connected.

The Soul of the South

What Is To Be Re-Done?

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

In the short run, New Orleans' displaced people need massive assistance with temporary housing, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition. On Sept. 2, the group urged Congress to fund emergency vouchers for "all households in need," make federal subsidies transferable for public-housing and Section 8 tenants, and ease the requirements for receiving aid.

The longer-term issues are more complex. Even while water was still pouring through the city's broken levees, House Speaker Dennis Hastert was suggesting that maybe New Orleans should be abandoned, and other right-wingers were urging that the city's poor be removed in order to disperse the "underclass."

New Orleans was an intensely impoverished city before the hurricane. Yet the city's African-American poor have created one of the nation's most distinctive urban subcultures, giving the world jazz, funk, and Mardi Gras. Sylvester Francis, who runs the Backstreet Cultural Museum in the Tremé neighborhood, named it that because "the culture comes from the back streets."

Tremé is likely to be a flashpoint when the residents' "right of return" rasps against redevelopment. One of the first neighborhoods settled by free black people in the early-19th century, it's the traditional terminus for the city's jazz-funeral parades and home to the Zulu Social

DO THE HUSTLE

Reconstruction Scams Unleashed on the Big Easy

Just weeks into the recovery along the Gulf Coast, it's looking like a corporate looting spree. First up was the KBR division of Halliburton, which received a \$500 million contract Sept. 1 to repair damaged naval facilities in Louisiana and Mississippi. This is in addition to a \$350 million contract KBR and three other companies received earlier this year to repair other naval facilities in Florida damaged by Hurricane Ivan in September 2004.

The Fluor and Bechtel corporations have also received contracts for emergency services and rebuilding. All three companies have made billions off the Iraq occupation.

Bush confidante Joe Allbaugh, the former head of FEMA, helped Halliburton. Allbaugh, who now runs a lobbying firm, showed up in Baton Rouge, Louisiana's capital, "just trying to lend my shoulder to the wheel." His clients include firms in the "disaster relief business."

Disaster management is one of the many federal areas being privatized, according to an investigative report last year by the *Jackson (Mississippi) Free Press*. Pleasant Mann, a 16-year FEMA veteran, wrote to Congress in June 2004 that "our professional staff are being systematically replaced by politically connected novices and contractors."

On Sept. 8, Bush signed an executive order suspending the federal law requiring government construction contractors to pay the prevailing wage in a region. This will allow federal contractors in affected areas of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana and Mississippi to avoid using union labor. Critics say it will also result in shoddy reconstruction, as cheaper and less-skilled workers are hired instead. Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.) noted that in New Orleans "the prevailing wage for construction labor is about \$9 per hour."

The \$51.8 billion emergency aid bill passed by Congress Sept. 8 included a provision raising the cap on federal employees using government-issued credit cards from \$15,000 to \$250,000. Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) noted there would be "no limit" on the number of purchases, and said it would lead to "extensive waste, fraud, and abuse." A congressional investigation in 2002 of the credit-card program found that purchases included children's clothing, video rentals, automotive supplies, pizzas, a dog and Internet pornography. —AK



Aid and Pleasure Club, which desegregated the Mardi Gras in 1968 and runs one of the main parades. According to 2000 Census figures, 44 percent of its residents made less than \$10,000 a year.

Yet the neighborhood occupies prime real estate, between the French Quarter and the Interstate 10 freeway, and was beginning to gentrify before the hurricane. When the reconstruction of New Orleans comes, is it going to be about resurrecting a community or removing it?

Sources: Kevin Powell, Sarah van Gelder of Yes! Magazine, Amy Wolf, sparkplugfoundation.org, Compiled by: Susan Chenelle & JB

Helping People Help Themselves

When the government fails its people as it so shamefully has in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the dire need for regular folks to step up and come together becomes undeniable. Here are ways you can provide real help to the victims of Hurricane Katrina now and in the hard weeks, months and years to come.

DONATE MONEY

The People's Hurricane Fund

c/o The Young People's Project
99 Bishop Allen Drive
Cambridge, MA 02139

A fund directed and administered by New Orleans evacuees who are organizing for community-led allocation of FEMA & Red Cross resources.

Baton Rouge Area Foundation

braf.org

The foundation's "Hurricane Katrina Displaced Residents Fund" is seeking funds to assist with housing, food and basic necessities for hurricane refugees. A second fund, "Hurricane Katrina New Orleans Recovery Fund," will help those who return to the greater New Orleans area get back on their feet.

New Orleans Fund

neworleansnetwork.org/donate

Set up by the League of Pissed-Off Voters, the Fund is working to build a team of media-, organizing- and advocacy-savvy New Orleans refugees who are ready to support their displaced neighbors during this crisis and to work for New Orleans to be restored in a way that includes the input of ordinary people.

NAACP Disaster Relief Efforts

naacp.org/disaster/contribute.php

4805 Mt. Hope Drive

Baltimore, MD 21215

NAACP units across the nation have begun

Building Power, Providing Aid

Malcolm X Grassroots Movement

388 Atlantic Ave., 4th Fl.
Brooklyn, NY 11217-1703
Btwn Hoyt & Bond Streets
718-254-8800

MXG is an established Black nationalist organization with branches in New York City and throughout the South. They are explicitly building networks of mutual aid independent of their government and based in the African-American community.

collecting resources that will be placed on trucks and sent directly into the disaster areas. Also, the NAACP has established a disaster relief fund to accept monetary donations to aid in the relief effort.

BlackAmericaWeb.com Relief Fund

This fund has been set up by nationally syndicated radio personality Tom Joyner.

Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children

FFLIC Hurricane Relief Fund

920 Platt Street
Sulphur, LA 70663

A 5-year-old statewide grassroots organization dedicated to creating a better life for Louisiana's youth, who are currently or at risk of being incarcerated. They are working to locate their members and to reunite children who are being released with their families and to find homes for those who have no homes to return to.

Critical Resistance

CriticalResistance.org

CR is a community group dedicated to fighting the pernicious effects of the "prison-industrial complex."

They are now both conducting aid work and politically challenging the criminalization of the victims. There's a big fight coming and they'll need our help.

FOOD & CLOTHES

Contact the organizations directly for lists of needed items.

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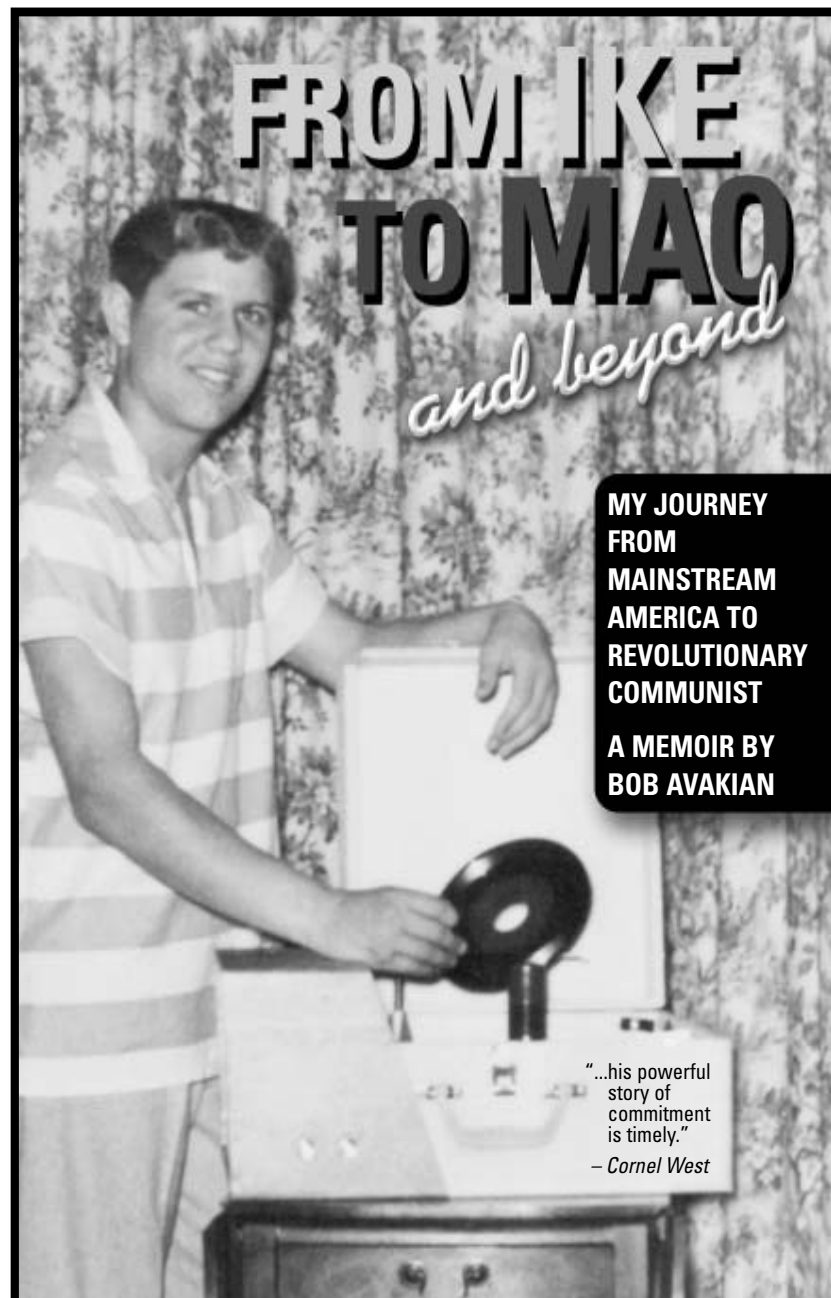
121 Saint Landry St.
Lafayette, LA 70506
attn: Minister Pamela Robinson
337-504-5374

Mohammad Mosque 65

2600 Plank Road
Baton Rouge, LA 70805
attn: Minister Andrew Muhammad
225-923-1400
225-357-3079

S.H.A.P.E. Community Center

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Houston, Texas 77004
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- Howard Zinn

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-Carol Downer, co-founder, Feminist Women's Health Centers

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PRAISE THE LORD

Christian Right Finds Opportunity in Tragedy

BY DANIEL TASRIPIN

Evaluating the destruction in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, the Christian conservative base of the Republican Party found a silver lining. “New Orleans now is abortion-free,” celebrated the Reverend Bill Shanks of the Christian conservative group The American Family Association. Having evacuated New Orleans for the safety of Jackson, Mississippi, he continually praised the devastation caused by Katrina.

“New Orleans is now Mardi Gras-free, New Orleans now is free of Southern Decadence and the sodomites, the witchcraft workers, false religion. ... [N]ow we’re going to start over again.”

Shanks is one of many evangelical Christian leaders, often characterized by their belief in a vengeful, jealous God, who are making waves by discerning divine will in this natural disaster. But such provocative remarks have not prevented charities tied to the Christian conservative movement from receiving the federal government’s stamp of approval as major players in the relief effort.

An early controversy arose when the group Operation Blessing, Pat Robertson’s proselytizing agency, was given a prominent place on a list of organizations to which the Federal Emergency Management Agency was sending people who wanted to donate Katrina-related aid. In light of the FEMA website’s omission of leading secular and non-sectarian aid groups from the list, commentators questioned whether the Bush administration was slanting donations to so-called “faith-based” charity groups.

Questioned by the press about the inclusion of Operation Blessing and absence of secular and non-sectarian groups, the administration directed all inquiries to FEMA. The agency has given no comment on the matter.



AP

Catastrophic Epiphanies

BY JOHN TARLETON

When Nicaragua’s capitol city of Managua was destroyed by an earthquake in 1972, the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza responded by helping itself to international relief supplies and reselling them on the black market for a fat profit. The rage against Somoza multiplied in the coming years, and his government was overthrown by a popular insurrection in July 1979.

In 1985, a powerful earthquake leveled hundreds of buildings in Mexico City and left thousands dead or trapped under the rubble. The government’s only response was to deny there was a problem. Mexicans, long accustomed to all aspects of public life being dominated by an authoritarian one-party state, took matters into their own hands and organized on a neighborhood level to rescue the missing and restore basic services. They also began to relentlessly hound previously unaccountable government officials to do their jobs. The challenge to business as usual didn’t end there. The government had lost its legitimacy, and a pro-democracy movement

emerged that over the next 15 years would ultimately help end one-party rule in Mexico.

It’s too soon to say how the public will respond to the Bush Administration’s handling of this obscene tragedy. Critics will continue to heap scorn on the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and its departed chief Michael Brown. Congressional inquiries will be held and reports will be solemnly issued. The Democrats will make a few timid, carefully calibrated criticisms. None of this matters. What matters is that despite paying taxes to a government that spends more than half a trillion dollars per year on “national security,” a great city has been lost due to pure folly while ever more blood and treasure is poured into a doomed and ignoble war in Iraq.

The media is back in full normalization mode. But it’s hard to believe that any but the most rabid partisans can listen again to Bush’s canned speeches and feel he is sincere and has the best interest of people at heart. The callousness of this administration and the system it is a product of stands exposed naked before us. Now what?

Aftershocks

POLICE TELL FEMALE SURVIVORS TO EXPOSE THEMSELVES

According to the *Liverpool Evening Echo*, police told a group of female survivors to expose their breasts if they wanted to be rescued. British tourist Ged Scott, who was at the Ramada Hotel in New Orleans said, “At one point, there were a load of girls on the roof of the hotel saying ‘Can you help us?’ and the policemen said ‘Show us what you’ve got’ and made signs for them to lift their T-shirts. When the girls refused, they said ‘fine’ and motored off down the road in their boat.”


NAVY PILOTS REPRIMANDED FOR RESCUING SURVIVORS

On Aug. 30, the day after the levees broke, two navy helicopter pilots responded to a Coast Guard transmission calling for rescue units and ferried 110 survivors to safety. Expecting to be treated as heroes, they were instead reprimanded by their commander at the Pensacola Naval Air Station the following day for diverting their efforts from resupplying military installations. Pilot Lt. Matt Udkow, who said that he saw few other rescue helicopters in New Orleans that Tuesday, was suspended from flying temporarily and reassigned to oversee an emergency kennel at the Pensacola base.

JAIL UP AND RUNNING

Food, water or medical supplies are scarce, but New Orleans does have a functioning jail that can hold over 600 prisoners in a Greyhound Bus Terminal near downtown. A small handwritten sign in the station proclaims, “Welcome to the New Angola South” in reference to the notorious Angola penitentiary in eastern Louisiana. The warden of Angola, Burl Cain, said of the Greyhound Jail, “This is a real start to rebuilding this city, this jail.”

DISASTER RELIEF On Sept. 2, Fifty firefighters were diverted to Biloxi, Mississippi by FEMA to stand alongside President Bush during a photo op.



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Counter-Recruiting Cuts Military Down to Size

BY F. TIMOTHY MARTIN

Hundreds of parents, students and school board members are organizing groups around the country to protest aggressive military recruiting activities.

Consider these recent actions:

On Aug. 30, a dozen people in Pittsfield, Mass. marched in the rain to protest high school recruiting in their community. The group handed out fliers advertising a public forum entitled 'Is the Military Your Best Option?'

On Aug. 29, Latino activists in San Diego launched a door-to-door campaign to inform Latino parents how military recruiters use information about their children. Latinos make up about one-third of the total recruits in Southern California.

On Aug. 28, 300 mostly Latino protestors marched through East Los Angeles to rally against the Iraq war and military recruitment on college campuses.

On Aug. 28, charges were dropped against the five "raging grannies" accused of trespassing in July after they tried to enlist at a military recruiting center in Arizona (see below).

On Aug. 25, a group of students, parents and faculty "took over" the Wescoe Beach plaza at the University of Kansas. Members of a local counter-recruitment organization made speeches and called for an end to the war and the military's presence on campus.

On Aug. 20, six protestors were arrested in Pittsburgh after police cracked down on a 100-person march against military recruit-

ment. Police shot at least two people with a 50,000-volt shock from a Taser gun. Another woman was bitten by a police dog. Over 11 complaints of excessive force have been filed.

On Aug. 13, members of the East End Veterans protested in front of the recruitment center in Riverhead, Long Island.

On Aug. 10, students and activists from The Truth Project, a local counter-recruitment group, held debates and protested at Lake Worth High School in Florida.

Such protests are the culmination of months of growing awareness that military recruiting is a major chink in the Pentagon's armor. Along with the high-profile activism of Cindy Sheehan, counter-recruiting has helped rejuvenate an antiwar movement increasingly on the lookout for a catalyst.

That may come on Sept. 24 in Washington, D.C., when tens of thousands are expected to rally against the war.

Coupling the work of antiwar coalitions like United for Peace and Justice, ANSWER and Troops Out Now with the efforts of popular musicians like Thievery Corporation, Steve Earle, Le Tigre and Jello Biafra, the latest mass mobilization could be a seminal moment to further the campaign against military recruitment.

But despite the signs of resistance, protesters face an uphill battle.

The U.S. Army alone is spending an additional \$500 million this year for such purposes. Part of their effort includes an aggressive television campaign targeting both English- and Spanish-speaking audiences.



IN BROOKLYN, Marine Corps recruiter Sgt. Ibanez (above) told a reporter that fighting in Iraq was "not my job." PHOTO: Antrim Caskey

Recruiters are also offering greater incentives, such as signing bonuses that may soon average over \$15,000.

Whether the money is paying off is questionable. After missing recruiting goals for most of the year, the Defense Department reported on Sept. 12 that all active duty branches of the armed services have met their targets for both July and August.

The army, however, moved the goalposts, lowering its recruiting goals in May. The army also admitted that it will fall short for the recruiting year, which ends in September. And both the Army Reserves and Guard expect even larger shortfalls. The Army and its branches supply most of the ground troops in Iraq.

Counter-recruiters are encouraged, too, by a bill in Congress that will allow high school students to have more control over their personal information.

Under the No Child Left Behind Act, local school districts must give up names, addresses and phone numbers upon request by recruiters unless parents "opt-out" by signing a written statement. Many students fail to notice the opt-out forms in the pile of

documents handed out at the beginning of the school year.

Sponsored by Mike Honda (D-CA), the Student Privacy Protection Act would prohibit military recruiters from acquiring students' information unless their parents "opt-in" and express their desire to be contacted.

Some school districts aren't waiting for politicians to act.

School boards in Madison, Wisconsin, Montclair, New Jersey and San Francisco have all taken steps to limit recruitment and inform parents how to opt-out. As a result, in Montclair opt-out rates are over 80 percent.

As communities across the nation become better educated on the matter, pundits and politicians are openly worrying about whether Americans will continue to contribute their sons and daughters to the war effort.

"There is no higher calling than our Armed Forces," said President Bush in a recent speech that could reflect growing alarm at declining recruitment.

For more information, see : CounterRecruiter.net, MilitaryFreeZone.org



Gitmo Prisoners On Hunger Strike

As many as 200 detainees at the U.S. prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, an occupied section of Cuba, are taking part in the most widespread hunger strike to date at the prison.

"People are desperate. They have been there three years. They were promised that the Geneva Conventions would be respected and various changes would happen and, unfortunately, the (U.S.) Government reneged on that," said British lawyer Clive Stafford-Smith, who represents one of the hunger strikers.

The military has acknowledged 128 prisoners are taking part in the hunger strike began, but attorneys put the total at 200 – nearly 40 percent of the total prison population.

Since the hunger strike began in the first week of August, 18 hunger strikers have been hospitalized including 13 who are being forced through intravenous tubes.

"They truly feel they have nothing left. I'm not sure what the end point will be. But I do predict there will be death," said attorney David Remes, who represents several Yemeni detainees.

Some of the hunger strikers have been detained for nearly four years without facing charges.

Several detainees have also reported recent beatings at the hands of military interrogators.

Detainees say one interrogator severely beat a Tunisian detainee with an empty beverage cooler and a metal chair. —MIKE BURKE

Grannies Raging Nationwide

A group of elderly Tucson women surprised the world when they tried to enlist in the U.S. Army, putting a new feminine face to the antiwar movement

BY JESSICA LEE

TUCSON, Arizona—Five women between the ages of 65 and 81 attempted to enlist in the U.S. Army and were arrested for criminal trespassing. Topped in Victorian hats and singing anti-war lyrics written to popular songs, the Tucson Raging Grannies surprised the world when they said they were serious about joining the Army.

"There are so many roadside bombings, and our soldiers are just targets over there," said Ellouese Upton, 75, a recent member of the Tucson group. Upton, like the other Grannies, feels that she has lived a long life and had the opportunity to raise a family. So she is willing to trade places with a young service man or woman in Iraq so they could come home and do the same.

The Tucson Grannies had their charges dropped in August after city attorneys felt the charges would have been difficult to prove.

The action, which was their first direct action, provided the fuel for Raging Grannies across the country to take the antiwar movement a step further. On Sept. 7, the Raging Grannies of Maine attempted to enlist in the Southern Portland Military Recruiting Office while singing, "We can teach peace, that violence and wars must cease, that we want our young to come back home, that's why we're here today."

For many such women the anti-war movement is deeply personal. Upton, for example, has three grandsons in the military. "I told each one of my three grandsons that I would get them to Mexico. I don't believe this war has anything to do with national security,



The Tucson Raging Grannies PHOTO: arizona.indymedia.org

and they don't understand they are being used to secure oil."

Counter-recruiting efforts have intensified across the country in the last several months. In Pittsburgh, six demonstrators were arrested, two were shot with tasers, and a 68-year-old woman was bitten by a dog, after a storm of people protested the recruiting center there in August. In May, four U.S. military recruiting offices in Seattle were shut down when demonstrators blocked the entrances to protest recruitment practices and to oppose the war on Iraq.

In the tradition of wise women elders, the general mission of the Raging Grannies chapters is to promote global peace, justice, and social and economic equality by raising

public awareness song and humor. For the last several years, these women have participated in protests against not only war, but also sweatshops, pollution, nuclear weapons, Wal-Mart and the Ford Motor Company.

The Grannies say they will keep raging until the war is over, including participating in anti-war demonstrations on Sept. 24.

"We've been talking among ourselves, we are feeling the need to include unhappy grandpas," said Patricia Birnie. "There are many peace loving men, including many who are ex-military and have seen war. What about Raging Geezers and Grannies?"

For more, see RagingGrannies.com and CounterRecruiter.net.

Hard-Right Turn for the Supreme Court

BY THE NATIONAL LAWYERS GUILD

Supreme Court nominee John Roberts has demonstrated an appalling lack of understanding of the circumstances of ordinary people and turned a blind eye to their constitutional rights.

A right-wing ideologue from the days when everyone, including the late Justice William Rehnquist, wore sideburns, he remains obedient to his corporate and Republican masters.

Roberts' nomination was announced just four days after he ruled in *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld* that the Geneva Convention did not apply to detainees being held as "enemy combatants." Roberts was first interviewed for a Supreme Court seat on April 1, before *Hamdan's* appeal was argued.

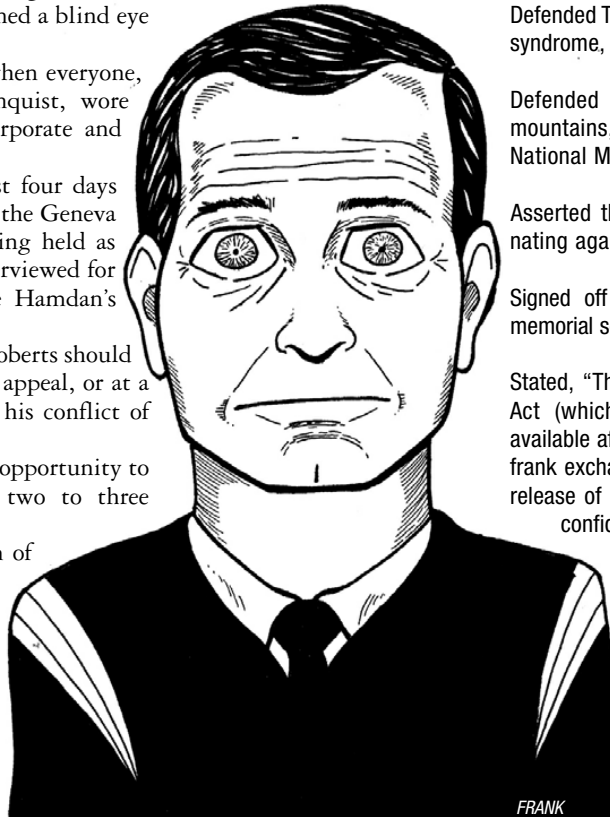
According to the ethical canons, Judge Roberts should have disqualified himself from hearing the appeal, or at a minimum, advised *Hamdan's* attorneys of his conflict of interest. He did neither.

The 50-year-old Roberts would have the opportunity to shape the Supreme Court for the next two to three decades.

Please write your Senators and tell them of your concerns about John Roberts.

For more information, go to alliancefor-justice.org or People for the American Way at pfaw.org.

The People's Lawyer is a project of the Nat'l Lawyers Guild, NYC Chapter. Contact the chapter at nlgnyc.org or at (212) 679-6018.



JOHN ROBERTS:

Defended Toyota for firing a woman with carpal tunnel syndrome,

Defended the practice of blasting off the tops of mountains, in a friend of the court brief for the National Mining Association,

Asserted that Operation Rescue was only discriminating against "pregnant people, not women,"

Signed off on Reagan's presidential telegram to a memorial service for 16,500 aborted fetuses,

Stated, "The existence of the [Presidential Records] Act (which makes administration records publicly available after 12 years) serves to burden the full and frank exchange of the advice now." He also opposed release of cabinet nominees backgrounds even on a confidential basis to Congress,

Believes the Endangered Species Act is unconstitutional,

Argued that the Medicaid Act did not create any rights that could be enforced by recipients.

Called Fair Housing laws "government intrusion."

Believes that children of illegal immigrants have no right to an education,

Sees the Voting Rights Act as creating "a quota system for electoral politics,"

Advised the Reagan administration that Congress should prevent federal courts from ordering busing to achieve school desegregation,

Characterized affirmative action as programs to promote "inadequately prepared candidates,"

Tried to deny a child the services of a sign-language interpreter in the classroom, in spite of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act,

Argued in 1991 that victims of sex discrimination could not sue for monetary damages, an argument the entire Supreme court, including Clarence Thomas, Antonin Scalia, and Rehnquist rejected,

Considers the federal civil rights statute, 42 United States section 1983, "the most serious federal court problem,"

Suggested that the National Labor Relations Board, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and the Consumer Products Safety Commission should be abolished because they usurp the Executive's powers.

'Constitutional' Crisis

Iraq: Cleansing The Voting Rolls

BY A.K. GUPTA

Katrina wiped more than New Orleans off the map—it wiped coverage of the Iraq war almost completely out of the news. The single deadliest event of the occupation—the stampede on a bridge in Baghdad during a religious festival that killed almost 1,000 people on Aug. 31—was overwhelmed by the flood of hurricane coverage.

But the war, insurgency and sectarian strife continue with no end in sight. One U.S. Army colonel told reporter Tom Lasserter that troops are locked in a stalemate with insurgents in the key province of Al Anbar.

"I don't think of this in terms of winning," said Col. Stephen Davis. Lasserter wrote that Davis "expects the insurgency to last for years."

"It's a war of attrition," added Marine Maj. Nicholas Visconti. "They're not trying to win. It's just like in Vietnam. They won a long, protracted fight that the American public did not have the stomach for."

The latest gimmick to defeat the insurgency is the constitutional process, but it's only sharpening the sectarian lines by enshrining "federalism." The proposed constitution allows for the Kurdish north and Shiite south to break off with the bulk of Iraq's oil wealth, leaving Sunni Arabs (and millions of poor Shiites) in the center with little more than sand and 138,000 heavily armed U.S. troops.

The constitution is set for a national plebiscite on Oct. 15, but with weeks to go, the national assembly has yet to finalize the document, meaning it can't be printed and distributed to the public.

Many Sunni Arabs and Shiite supporters of the popular cleric Moqtada Al-Sadr are registering to cast a no vote. Under the electoral process, if three of Iraq's 18 provinces reject the constitution by a two-thirds majority, the document fails, the assembly is dissolved and the process starts from scratch.

At the same time, the U.S. launched its latest all-out assault, this time near the Syrian border in the city of Tal Afar. With some 200,000 residents it's almost as large as the devastated city of Falluja. Similarly, most of the city's residents reportedly fled in advance of the attack.

Of the residents who remained in Tal Afar, all "military-age" men were rounded up and paraded before masked informants who decided their fate: release or prison.

By using 5,000 Kurdish forces (along with nearly 4,000 GIs) in the attack on Tal Afar, the U.S. military is brazenly inflaming ethnic tensions. Almost daily, reports are surfacing of bodies turning up and mass executions by Iraqi security forces. At the same time, bombings continue against Shiites — with one in Baghdad on Sept. 14 killing more than 75 day laborers.

The U.S. military is conducting a series of rolling assaults on Sunni regions — Tal Afar, some 90 percent Sunnis from the Turkmen



DEMOCRACY on the march. PHOTO: Tom Lasserter, KRT

ethnic group, was followed by an attack on the Sunni town of Haditha. The attacks are meant to compensate for U.S. forces stretched too thin to hold the regions they raid. But it may be part of a possible U.S. strategy.

During the run-up to national elections in January, U.S. troops combined military raids with electioneering, ensuring that Sunni Arabs would reject the elections wholesale as a rigged process.

Now, with hundreds of thousands of Sunnis being displaced or rounded-up during these assaults, it appears that the U.S. military may be trying to cleanse the voting roles in advance of the Oct. 15 referendum.

Sunni politicians have explicitly charged that the Iraqi government is deliberately rounding up members of their community to prevent them from registering. This led to the release of 1,000 detainees from the notorious Abu Ghraib prison on Aug. 27.

The Bush administration appears to be gambling that provoking a civil war may allow it to defeat the insurgency. The question is will it—and Iraq—be able to weather the coming storm?

HABEUS CORPUS BITES THE DUST

Court Rules Detention for Life Without Trial Is 'Legal'

A federal appeals court has ruled that the government can indefinitely detain U.S. citizens without trial.

The ruling came down in the case of Jose Padilla — a Brooklyn-born man accused of plotting to set off a "dirty bomb" inside the United States.

Padilla has been held for over three years in solitary confinement on a Navy brig. No charges have ever been filed against him and he has never appeared before a judge.

The U.S. 4th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the president has the authority to detain individuals "in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States."

Writing the decision was Judge J. Michael Luttig, who is reportedly being considered by President Bush as a potential Supreme Court nominee.

The ruling overturns an earlier decision by U.S. District Judge Henry Floyd that "indefinite detention without trial" is unconstitutional.

"The court's ruling effectively declares the entire world, including the United States, to be a battlefield subject to military jurisdiction, where American citizens can be stripped of their constitutional rights," said Deborah Pearlstein of Human Rights First.

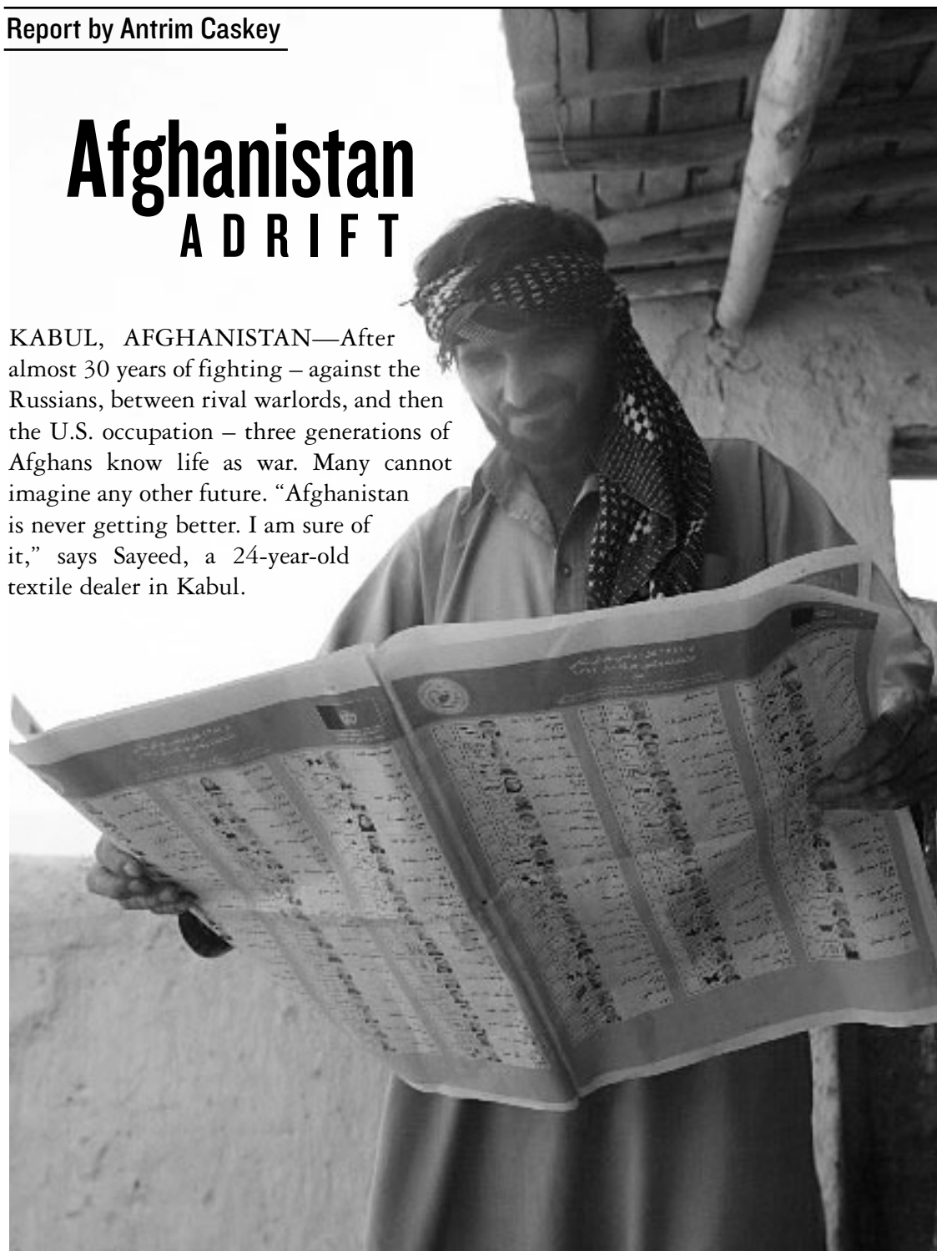
Padilla's attorney, Donna Newman, plans to appeal the decision.

"They're telling him he's going to be held forever, that he has no rights," Newman said. "What they're saying is worse than a life sentence." —Mike Burke



Afghanistan A D R I F T

KABUL, AFGHANISTAN—After almost 30 years of fighting – against the Russians, between rival warlords, and then the U.S. occupation – three generations of Afghans know life as war. Many cannot imagine any other future. “Afghanistan is never getting better. I am sure of it,” says Sayeed, a 24-year-old textile dealer in Kabul.



AFGHAN READING sample ballot in Sargardana, a hilltop village outside of Kabul. PHOTO: ANTRIM CASKEY

A prevailing attitude among dispossessed young men in Kabul, especially Panjshiris from the north, is that the parliamentary elections scheduled for September 18 are meaningless; they don't even consider voting. “They don't care about the people. They care about their own pockets,” Sayeed says disgustedly when asked if he would vote. The problem, he continues, is, “the people don't have education; only 15 percent of the people read and write. After school I could not go to university to learn.”

The figures for illiteracy vary substantially, depending upon who you talk to. For women, it's estimated at 85 to 95 percent; for men, it's been reported from 65 to 85 percent. In postwar Afghanistan, it is hard to know anything for certain.

The people I've spoken to who express hope for Afghanistan or any enthusiasm for the elections are almost exclusively linked to the United Nations-administered Joint Election Management Body (JEMB) or working towards the elections in another capacity. Each international worker is mentoring a national counterpart, and when the international workers leave after the dissolution of JEMB, the nationals will take over their roles. These Afghans are voting; they have invested in the voting process.

Heymara, 26, a radio producer and reporter working for Sayara Communications, a media group that has organized three mobile theatre troupes to perform educational plays about the elections, told me that she would vote. But when asked if she was married, she shrank back as if from a flame and said, “Do I look married?” Heymara's attitude toward life and her own capabilities are not the norm in Afghanistan.

JEMB civic educators are traveling throughout Afghanistan to lecture to villages on how the elections work. On Sept. 7, I visited Sargardana, a hard-scrabble hilltop village just outside of Kabul's old city, where Meherab Budin, 35, told me that he will

vote. The JEMB educators have been to Sargardana several times—they say the repeat visits are critical to teaching Afghans how the system works. Budin would not say who he would vote for, only that he will “vote for the honest people that will work for the people. The vote is sacred.”

On Sept. 8, I met Sharnas, a burqa-clad 40-year-old, at Dehyaya High School on the outskirts of Kabul after a performance by the mobile theatre troupe. She is a cleaner at the Children's Hospital in Kabul. Sharnas sat in a classroom with about 40 women from the surrounding mud-house villages while the men watched the performance. She said she would vote, but also complained of her swollen arthritic wrist and that there is “no water for drinking here.”

One of the first questions people ask me is where am I from. Saying the U.S.A. and New York draws smiles, gasps and sometimes a sardonic nod. From Yaqoobshag Ansari, who runs the Internet center at the Sahr-E-Naw Post Office in Kabul to Afghan National Air Force Commander Abdul Malick, the chorus is “US is my friend, they help us.” (I have so far only been in the north, and may receive a different welcome in the more conservative south.)

Americans do not always return those warm feelings, as I saw when I accompanied a delivery of fresh fruit and vegetables to two U.S. Special Forces bases in Paktika province, on the border with Pakistan. At the first stop, Afghan soldiers, presumably being trained by the Americans, quickly surrounded our helicopter. Then the Americans, dressed in tan desert fatigues, sped up to the craft on ATVs and Humvees. “Hey you!” an officer yelled at the gathered Afghans, jabbing his finger in the air, almost charging the crowd, “Get the fuck out of here.” It felt like that was a common attitude towards Afghans among the military and its U.S. contractors: that they have important jobs to do and can't let the Afghans get in the way.

Monarchy Off Balance, Maoists Appeal to Parties

Insurrection in Katmandu?

BY GARY LEUPP

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) announced that its guerrilla forces, the New People's Army, will observe a three-month ceasefire. This is particularly significant in that the move is a unilateral one. The regime might decide to respond in kind, and reign in the Royal Nepali Army, which is reportedly unhappy with the war and the king.

There have been two ceasefires since the People's War began in 1996—from June to November 2001 and January to June 2003. But these were declared by both sides, and accompanied by peace talks with the regime. This time, having bested the RNA in at least one recent major battle, the Maoists control about 80% of the country.

In past peace talks, the Maoists' insisted on the convening of a national assembly to fashion a new constitution as their condition for ending the revolutionary war.

Persistent conflict between the legal political parties and the king, greatly exacerbated since King Gyanendra seized absolute power, has allowed the Maoists to play the two off against one another. But after seizing power, declaring martial law and unleashing a wave of terror against his mainstream political rivals, Gyandendra proposed holding talks with the Maoists only to find them no longer interested.

Seven Parliamentary Parties

The seven political parties whose members constituted 190 out of 205 representatives in the dissolved National Assembly have formed an alliance against Gyanendra. They had not challenged the monarchy (which dates back to 1768, and involves a strong Hindu religious element) in principle, but recently the two largest parliamentary parties, the Nepali Congress Party and the Nepal Communist Party (United Marxist-Leninist), held important meetings in which they abandoned support for the institution. They have expressed interest in holding talks with the Maoists in order to coordinate opposition to the dictatorship.

Increasingly emboldened, the alliance held an illegal demonstration of over 5000 Sunday, the largest since the king seized power.

Now, Gyanendra's worst fear is a united front of the Maoists and the mainstream parties. The king's international supporters urge a restoration of the parliament under the old rules as the best defense against Maoist revolution. But particularly if that doesn't happen, it seems as though public demonstrations in Kathmandu will include a Maoist element agitating, alongside the alliance parties' supporters, for an end to the monarchy.

The party presence in the capital and surrounding region (where most of the wealthy live) is reportedly weaker than in the provinces, although its student and women's organizations are quite powerful in the city. A united front could provide conditions for a more powerful presence, even as a ceasefire allows



NEPAL: Increasingly militant protests spread to Katmandu, with much of the countryside under rebel control.

the Maoists to further consolidate political power in the zones more or less under its control. The relationship between the People's War in the countryside and the capital city of Kathmandu is the crucial issue as Nepal faces the very real prospect of revolution.

U.S. Jitters

U.S. ambassador James Moriarty has warned that “Nepal is getting to the point where its very existence is at stake,” and in June raised the specter of guerrillas marching into downtown Kathmandu “within the next 12 to 14 months.”

The Maoists plan to complement their conquest of the countryside with an urban insurrection. As Prachanda told *Time Magazine* in April, “Our strategy for this last stage will be to fuse urban insurrection to protracted People's War.” The plan, is that the residents of Kathmandu won't simply line the streets to meet columns of arriving guerrillas, but be active participants in an uprising during or before the latter's advance.

The base areas have indeed been consolidated and expanded in the last four years, and Prachanda has intimated that victory (i.e., seizure of power in Kathmandu) may be near.

The Maoists do want to encourage the mainstream parties' actions against the palace, and to promote the advocacy of democracy versus monarchy, as key to winning in the city. Not because they want a return to the former set-up in which corrupt parties (including the several “communist” ones) serving the elite dominate an ineffectual parliament. They want a secular, socialist republic, radical land reform, universal education and medical care, equal rights for men and women and members of all ethnic groups, abolition of the caste system.

In any case, if we start to hear about massive rallies in Kathmandu involving both the alliance parties and the Maoists, and maybe defectors from the military and police, we will hear the death-knell of Nepal as a Hindu kingdom trapped in the Middle Ages. And then maybe, soon thereafter, the strains of the Internationale.

Reprinted from *CounterPunch.org*

You say you want a revolution

BY BENNETT BAUMER

While many radicals of the 1960s became liberals or conservatives, or went all the way and committed suicide, writer Tariq Ali has been steadfast in his revolutionary convictions. In *Street Fighting Years* — *An Autobiography of the Sixties*, originally published in 1987 but reissued this year with the addition of an interview with John Lennon and Yoko Ono, Ali tells of his youthful travels on the heels of Ché Guevara in Bolivia and witnessing the bloody carnage of U.S. imperialism in Vietnam. Also part of this lengthy but engaging book is the writer's recollections of massive student and worker upheaval in Europe and Asia.

The cliché goes, "If you remember the '60s, you weren't there." Nonetheless, the clarity and breadth of Ali's experiences during the radical decade put you squarely in the times.

Before he became a leading leftist voice, Ali slipped into Ché's revolutionary Bolivia and encountered reactionary generals who, Ali muses years later, said they wished they had killed him along with Ché.

Perhaps the most powerful images of the book come from his diary of visiting war-torn Vietnam. In his entry for Jan. 29, 1967, Ali describes a Vietnamese city whose hospital was bombed by U.S. planes, "Two hundred dwellings have been destroyed. Dang Batao, the local Red Cross organizer, was burnt to death. ... Impossible to visualize this agony in the West ... I look for military targets. There are none."

However great the destruction in Vietnam, Ali found inspiration in the resistance of the Vietnamese peo-

ple and was a leader in the British-Vietnam Solidarity Campaign. For the author, the resistance to imperialism in Asia became connected to student and worker rebellion in Europe. It built to a crescendo in Prague, Paris, Berlin and London in 1968, and there are three chapters dedicated to that year.

Ali also goes back to his native Pakistan to work against the military dictatorship, and is met by comical rumors spread by the Islamist right-wing press that he "fornicated with 'dozens of Jewish girls in one afternoon.'"

An interview conducted with John Lennon and Yoko Ono in 1971 adds insight into both Lennon's evolving radicalism and Ono's feminist influence.

It has become fashionable for many of Ali's contemporaries to blast their '60s idealism and activity. For Ali, the meaning of those years is that resistance to empire continues with the unabashed goal of taking power from the capitalists and returning it to the people. *Street Fighting Years* is a good read for anyone wanting to get beyond the usual tag of the '60s as being drug laced and self preoccupied.

Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties
By Tariq Ali
Verso Books, 2005

Schiavo's Revenge

BY SUSANNA THOMAS

Just Like Heaven
Directed by Mark Waters

Just Like Heaven, from Dreamworks Productions, is a beautiful, poignant, romantic comedy — and a lovely piece of right-wing propaganda.

Reese Witherspoon stars as Elizabeth, a devoted but lonely young doctor who signs a living will requesting that her life not be artificially prolonged. Following a car accident, she falls into a coma for three months. Her disembodied spirit must then convince the handsome man now renting her apartment to prevent her sister from signing the release form to terminate life support.

In the end, her hero steals her body from the hospital and wakes her up with a kiss, Sleeping-Beauty style. The guy gets the girl, and Elizabeth finds out that having a boyfriend is, in the words of her mentor, "what it's all about." Her diminished brain function from the effects of the coma brings her, in the words of her new boyfriend, "down to [his] level," and everybody lives happily ever after.

Just Like Heaven seems like it was written by someone who was unhappy with the outcome of the Terry Schiavo case. It is peppered with lines such as, "Of course I'll



On a Falluja street, U.S. soldier and Iraqi boy.

THE REALITY OF WAR IN IRAQ

BY JOHN TARLETON

When the antiwar movement that converges on Washington, D.C., on Sept. 24, it will, thanks to Cindy Sheehan, have wind in its sails. The case will be made (again) that the best way to support the troops in Iraq is to bring them home now. But who are the troops? What are they doing exactly, and how do they feel about it?

In *Occupation: Dreamland*, a gritty documentary about a squad of soldiers stationed on the edge of Falluja, Garrett Scott and Ian Olds present a revealing, unvarnished glimpse into the day-to-day routine of the occupation. Narrated by the soldiers themselves, the movie is set in the months before the "City of Mosques" exploded in open rebellion against the U.S. occupation in April 2004. The film conveys the reality of war — long stretches of boredom punctuated by sudden, unexpected bursts of violence.

The camera allows us to follow members of the 82nd Airborne as they make almost comic public relations forays by day, raid people's homes by night, endure repeated insurgent ambushes, and kill time in their barracks listening to death metal and wondering why the fuck they are in Iraq.

Locked in a deadly game of cat and mouse with an invisible enemy, these grunts come across as neither heroes nor psychopaths (with one exception), but

rather as people with limited life opportunities resigned to working an unpleasant job. They show more curiosity about why the war is being fought than the average member of the media and they know that their lives are held cheaply by more ambitious higher-ups.

At the same time, there is never any doubt about whether they will carry out their orders. No Camilo Mejias or Kevin Benders in this bunch. Perhaps the most shocking scene occurs when a large group of soldiers are subjected to a scathing re-enlistment pitch in which they are told that they might as well sign up again since they will leave the Army unable to make it in the real world.

Occupation: Dreamland drifts at times, moving from one pointless or counterproductive mission to the next. The pacing of the film, however, captures the steadily brutalizing impact of the war on both frustrated soldiers and local residents. Unfortunately, the film only presents Iraqi voices in passing — when they are pleading not to be detained or arguing with soldiers who drop in on an auto repair shop to chat up the locals. The Fallujans make it clear they are a proud people tired of empty promises and gun-toting foreigners ransacking their homes. The soldiers know they are helpless to solve the problems around them and can only offer friendly platitudes. And the audience, for its part, possesses the tragic knowledge that the situation will soon get much, much worse.

Occupation: Dreamland
Directed by Ian Olds and Garrett Scott (79 min.)
opens Sept. 23
at Cinema Village



REESE WITHERSPOON stars in a romantic comedy that parrots the talking points of the Christian right.

help you [steal the body]. I don't want to let them kill Abby's little sister!" Or, Abby herself, who tearfully asks the forgiveness of her newly awakened little sister, saying, "I can't believe we almost let you go." The attending physician states that Elizabeth was opposed to heroic measures, adding, "Most doctors are," to which Elizabeth's ghost

responds, "Yes, but that was before taking into account the present circumstances. I completely support it now!"

Abby must make the choice between "look[ing] out for" her sister, and "respect[ing] her wishes"; in the movie, "looking out for" the patient in the coma clearly wins. The point is that legislation is

needed to silence those right-to-die advocates once and for all.

Once again, the far right has successfully used popular culture to deliver its message. Honestly, if you want to make a political point, you can either picket a dying woman's hospital room or create a beautiful movie that will make audiences cry. Which would you rather see?



BODY as BATTLEGROUND

Taking it off to make a point

BY AMY WOLF

Naked protesting has flourished around the world in response to the Iraq War. In 2003, naked bodies spelled out simple and powerful anti-war messages throughout Europe, Australia and the United States. A March 5, 2004, CNN headline read "Naked anti-war demonstrations sweep world." Nudity as protest harnesses a corporate media that otherwise abstracts and sanitizes war.

When the body is the battleground, baring it makes perfect sense. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals waged their successful "I'd rather wear nothing at all than wear fur" campaign with the help of naked celebrities and direct actions.

In 2004, at the March for Women's Lives in Washington, D.C., women used their bare bodies to punctuate messages like, "Keep your laws of my silky draws."

At the 2004 Republican National Convention in New York City, nine

ACT UP! activists painted "Stop AIDS" and "Drop the Debt" on their naked bodies, getting their message out and garnering extensive media attention.

The World Naked Bike Ride 2005 is taking place in 12 countries to call attention to the global oil crisis and one of its remedies.

In opposition to Australia's support for the U.S. position in Iraq, Aussie singer and peace activist Grace Knight organized "Disrobe to Disarm," in which 750 unclad women used their bodies to spell out, "NO WAR" surrounded by a heart. Knight cites as the "reasons for the nakedness: one is that it is total vulnerability ... and in that vulnerability there's also an awful lot of power."

Scholar Isaac Souweine suggests that "nudity implies a righteous innocence." The Dixie Chicks employed this type of innocence when they appeared naked on the cover of *Entertainment Weekly* after being pilloried for expressing shame at being from the same state as George W. Bush.

Nude protest comes from a legacy of civil disobedience in "personalist" politics, as led by Tolstoy, Thoreau and Gandhi. Their teachings emphasize the importance of the individual in social struggle. Personal dissent and resistance manifests through marches, boycotts, sit-ins, hunger strikes, breaking unjust laws, political rallies and political performances.

Nudity is the ultimate expression of the personal and intimate. Public nudity is a rejection of the hypocrisy, materialism, and moral authoritarianism promoted through the state. Critics of public T&A write it off as self-indulgent or exhibitionist, or even dismiss it as a spectacle used by the hyper-sexualized media.

Souweine argues, however, that protesters show savvy by using the media to amplify their message.



READ MY ASS: 47-year-old Syrian-born Hala Faisal was arrested after wading into the Washington Square fountain. PHOTO: Jefferson Siegel/Downtown Express

Some claim that the shock and giggle value simply obscure the message. This is a valid caution to any who dare to drop trou' in public. It is important for the activists to communicate with their audience once they've got their attention. The synchronized cheerleader-letter forms carry the power of a collective voice, while avoiding a close-up shot on the baker's dozens of hair pies. Block letters that circumnavigate nipples and belly buttons get your message read, but

only if the word count is kept to a minimum.

One self-described radical Jew scaled a phone pole in Astor Place in New York in March 2005 and stayed there for two hours in mock crucifixion, draped in only a cloth bearing an anti-war slogan.

The entertainment value of activism in the raw is neither negligible nor accidental. It stands with other political performers from the Radical Cheerleaders and Billionaires for Bush to the Hungry Marching Band and Code Pink. These people invigorate and inspire the masses that gather for endless protests for endless wars.

On Aug. 15, 2005, a Syrian Artist, Hala Faisal, painted bold anti-war text in English and Arabic across her body and waded with angry gestures in the Washington Square fountain until police arrested her 10 minutes later. Hers was a strange prelude to the rage of those wading through the toxic soup in New Orleans.

For every body floating in the stagnant waters left behind by Katrina, there are dozens we do not see in unmarked graves in Iraq. On Sept. 24, activists may once again expose themselves to expose this truth.

Sex questions? indygstring@yahoo.com

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Saturday, Sept. 17 @ 7PM - Free
Reading: Martha Ackelsberg
"Free Women Of Spain"
She recounts the activities of the anarchist women's organization "Mujeres Libres", which engaged over 20,000 working-class women in programs of education and empowerment.

Monday, Sept. 19 @ 7PM - Free
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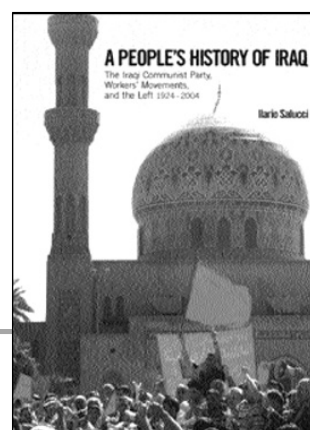
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NEW ORLEANS MUSIC

Can the Orchid Survive the Storm?

New Orleans' Congo Square is arguably the most important historical site in American music. It's the only place in the United States where the abducted Africans were allowed to play drums, which was forbidden everywhere else because the slaveowners feared the beats would carry voodoo kill-the-toubob messages. The result was that the rich polyrhythms of West Africa became part of the city's fabric, and when horn players like Louis Armstrong crossed them with European brass-band music, it begat jazz.

BY STEVE WISHNIA

The brass-band tradition continues to this day, with groups like the Dirty Dozen, the Forgotten Souls and the Tremé Brass Band. Listen to the Dirty Dozen's version of "Just a Closer Walk With Thee," booming bass drums and growling horns breaking into a chaotic, swaying march, and then you realize: This is music for a funeral – the sorrow-into-joy second-line processions by which New Orleans bids farewell to its most beloved. Ironically, the Dozen cut their *Funeral for a Friend* album in December 2003, a month before the sunset of street musician Anthony "Tuba Fats" Lacen, to whom the album is dedicated.

New Orleans' second great musical tradition is piano players. Out of ragtime, rumba, boogie, Chopin and whorehouse ivory-tickling came a raft of greats: Professor Longhair, the mad genius James Booker, Dr. John, Champion Jack Dupree and more. Fats Domino was playing rock'n'roll years before Elvis, reworking Dupree's dope-fiend folk song "Junker's Blues" as "The Fat Man" in 1950. Little Richard, in my taste the hottest of all the primordial '50s rockers, did almost all of his records in New Orleans with local musicians, fueling the frenzy with Earl Palmer's drums and Lee Allen's sax.

New Orleans singers hit the charts regularly in the R&B and soul eras of the '60s, mostly as one-hit wonders like Ernie K-Doe's "Mother-in-Law," Irma Thomas's "Time Is on My Side" (covered by the Rolling Stones for their first big U.S. hit) and Aaron Neville's ballad "Tell It Like It Is." On his exquisite 1981 EP *Orchid in the Storm*, Neville's singing evokes the evanescent bliss of religious ecstasy, a heroin high and a teenage boy in his first slow dance.

By the 1970s, New Orleans music was largely gone from the national charts, but it was experiencing another great efflorescence. The city's African-rooted soil was fertile ground for funk, most notably the minimalist grooves of the legendary Meters, which hip-hop artists would later sample almost as much as they did P-Funk and James Brown. Scores of lesser-knowns cut amazing records too, like Roger and the Gypsies' "Pass the Hatchet" and Eddie Bo's "Hook and Sling."



BEFORE THE FLOOD: Street musicians in New Orleans' Jackson Square. Washboard Chaz, right, is known to have survived. PHOTO: Steve Wishnia

The city's music scene isn't immune to the poverty and racism that surround it. Cyril Neville, the youngest and most political of the Neville Brothers, once described it as "a weird mix of beauty and violence." Tuba Fats was only 53 when he died. James Booker and others died time in the notorious Angola state prison for drug offenses. Professor Longhair, now the icon of the city's piano style – his portrait hangs over the stage at the club Tipitina's – was suffering from malnutrition and working as a card hustler and record-shop janitor when he was rediscovered by a white blues fan in 1969. One well-known jazz spot closed last year after the owner was arrested for killing a homeless man who'd been selling beer in front of the club. And while the musicians are racially integrated, the audiences usually aren't.

Most important, though, New Orleans' music is proudly local, intensely indigenous, part of the

city's life in the way corporate entertainment product can't be. Music is played for the community, to party, not purely in pursuit of stardom. You might hear bands mix century-old jazz flavors with hip-hop beats, follow a bebop-era standard with deep funk. These qualities, and the unique cultural ecology that produced them, are grossly endangered by the destruction from the hurricane and the land grabs that are likely to follow.

What I fear is that if the reconstruction of New Orleans concentrates on maximizing real-estate profits and rejects rebuilding communities, the city's vital music scene could be reduced to overpriced black music for white people, either as frat party or museum piece. Worse, it could end up like the Bourbon Street tourist traps that feature bands playing '80s MTV covers – like a McDonald's in the land of red beans and rice.



DAVID HELLENBACH

APOCALYPSE AND SURVIVAL IN AMERICA

BY DONALD PANETH

The house of cards is falling.

Apocalyptic events are occurring with rapidity and cumulative effect. President George W. Bush's incompetence and pretensions are becoming clearer with each event.

The events – Hurricane Katrina and the destruction of New Orleans and other Gulf cities, gasoline and heating-oil price rises, continuing United States aggression in Iraq and Afghanistan, a series of food emergencies in Africa, unresolved nuclear weapons questions, the U.S.-manipulated debacle at the United Nations – are overwhelming.

As a phenomenon, apocalypse is difficult for one to encompass.

Apocalypse exceeds tragedy. It is not Biblical; it is contemporary and real. It reveals the inner character of situations, events, and people. It produces extraordinary levels of death and destruction.

Describing parts of Harrison County, Mississippi, after Katrina, Gov. Haley Barbour said, "It looks like Hiroshima is what it looks like."

Numerous American writers, painters, filmmakers have presented the reckless, violent, criminal, psychopathic aspects of American life and society.

Stephen Crane published *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* in 1893, Maggie victimized by society and her family.

Robinson Jeffers wrote "Shine, Perishing Republic" in 1924, advising his sons to "be in nothing so moderate as in love of man... when the cities lie at the monster's feet there are left the mountains."

James T. Farrell's great trilogy, *Studs Lonigan*, appeared in 1932-1935. Studs, hanging out on the street corners of Chicago, embodied the purposelessness of America.

In the 1950s, Ad Reinhardt painted his black canvases, Franz Kline his symbolic black-and-white works.

Jackson Pollock went berserk on canvas.

William Baziotes painted monsters of the psyche.

Nicholas Christopher's *Somewhere in the Night: Film Noir and the American City* is a prophetic study, published in 1997.

He wrote:

"In film noir, a primary implication is that the city of tomorrow will be an apocalyptic city.

"Noir continues to be one of the central cultural phenomena of the... American city... and emblemizes times of great stress."

The quest of the individual in noir, Christopher said, "may devolve from a goal of illumination with a slim chance of escape... to one of bare survival while seeking out the least excruciating torment."

If America doesn't courageously alter course, it is going to hit the jackpot.

There are not many warning signs left to be observed along the imploding American way, in the collapsing system.

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DAVID HOLLENBACH

Why Protest?

BY GEOFF MENDOZA

When one woman showed up outside George Bush's ranch demanding nothing more than dialogue and received massive national media attention for weeks on end, the anti-war movement stopped momentarily to rethink itself. "Is this the new face of protest?" wrote *The Nation*.

Groups like United for Peace & Justice spend thousands of dollars and countless human energy hours organizing mass protests such as the unprecedented Feb. 15, 2003, protests. While those gathered more than 10 million people worldwide to condemn the then-pending war on Iraq, it obviously didn't stop it.

So in advance of the Sept. 24 mass protests in Washington, D.C., it's worth reflecting on the usefulness of such demonstrations.

Undeniably, mass protests against the war still serve as vivid proof that millions of American citizens do not support imperialism. While politicians sing their siren song bidding us all to acquiesce, and the media amplify those voices, for at least the brief hours of a protest, the lullaby is interrupted.

For everyone not present at the demonstration, however, the media play a significant role in determin-

ing how effectively protests communicate to the public. The media often minimizes the number of participants, as FAIR, a media watch group, has repeatedly shown. But even if the events are accurately reported, the reasons for them are often ignored.

Even so, the visible frustration of hundreds of thousands of citizens angry at U.S. policy is a powerful force, and if nothing else, signals to the rest of the world that not everyone in this country supports its policies. Without the anti-war protests in February and March 2003 the world might have thought all Americans were oil-hungry cowboys, and had New York passively accepted the Republicans last summer, it would have seemed as if we'd finally toppled over the cliff into fearful complacency and bourgeois apathy.

Nonetheless, protests should not be viewed in isolation; they are only one expression of a larger movement. As Bill Dobbs, a spokesperson for UFPJ, said, "A single event is not going to cause a change, but an event that is part of continued organizing can make a difference."

Indeed, it is the other branches of the antiwar movement that have made truly tangible dents in the war machine. Counter-recruitment efforts, for example, have become one

of the most important methods of resistance, starving the military of its most valuable resource. By deterring people from enlisting, counter-recruitment not only saves lives, but also may make the Bush administration think twice about starting more wars of aggression.

Its important to note, however, that even during the Vietnam War, it was not so much the massive demonstrations and torrents of disgusted letters to members of Congress that ended the war. Rather, it was the Vietnamese people's relentless resistance that eventually forced the United States out of Vietnam.

Mass protests are the cannon blasts of the antiwar movement, loud and powerful, but not particularly precise. They scream the outrage of a people, but that scream is more emotive than articulate. We don't protest to end wars. We protest for the same reason we scream obscenities when we slam our fingers in a car door: pain makes us cry out. We protest for the same reason poor kids in the Bronx invented hip-hop: When the system's trying to keep you down, sometimes throwing a party is the only way to get up. Protests don't solve problems, but as part of a larger strategy of resistance, they help keep us sane while we rage against the war machine.



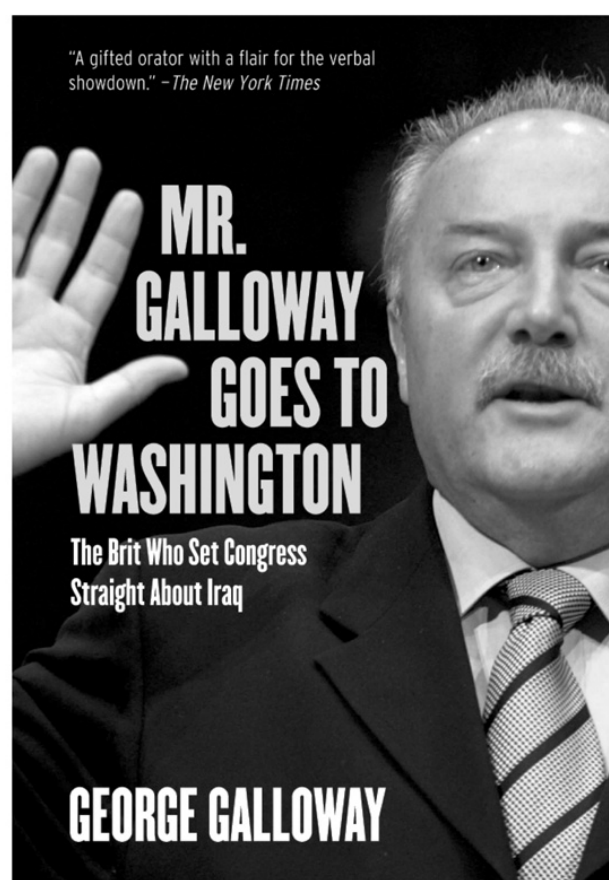
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WILL HELP EVER COME? Hundreds waited in the sun outside the Superdome in the sun for hours with hopes of food, a drink of water or a bus ride out of town. Photo: AP

In the First Days

By MALIK RAHIM

The hurricane hit at the end of the month, the time when poor people are most vulnerable. Food stamps don't buy enough but for about three weeks of the month, and by the end of the month everyone runs out. Now they have no way to get their food stamps or any money, so they just have to take what they can to survive. Many people are getting sick and very weak. Little scratches and sores are turning into major wounds from the toxic water that people are walking through.

People whose homes and families were not destroyed went into the city right away with boats to bring the survivors out, but law enforcement told them they weren't needed. They were willing and able to rescue thousands, but they weren't allowed to. Every day countless volunteers were trying to help, but they were turned back. Despite this, almost all the rescues were done by volunteers.

People were told to go to the Superdome, but they had no food, no water there. And before they could get in, people had to stand in line for four to five hours in the rain because everybody was being searched one by one at the entrance.

My son and his family - his wife and kids, ages one, five and eight - were flooded out of their home when the levee broke. They had to swim out until they found an abandoned building with two rooms above water level. There were 21 people in those two rooms for a day and a half. A guy in a boat who just said "I'm going to help regardless" rescued them and took them to Highway I-10 and dropped them there. They sat on the freeway for about three hours, because someone said they'd be rescued and taken to the Superdome. Finally they just started walking, had to walk six and a half miles.

When they got to the Superdome, my son wasn't allowed in—I don't know why—so his wife and kids wouldn't go in. They kept walking, and they happened to run across a guy with a tow

truck that they knew, and he gave them his own personal truck. When they got here, they had no gas, so I had to punch a hole in my gas tank to give them some gas, and now I'm trapped. I'm getting around by bicycle.

People from Plaquemines Parish were rescued on a ferry and dropped off on a dock near here. All day they were sitting on the dock in the hot sun with no food, no water. They were all sitting there surrounded by armed guards. We asked the guards if we could bring them water and food. My mother and all the other church ladies were cooking for them, and we have plenty of good water. But the guards said, "No. If you don't have enough water and food for everybody, you can't give anything." Finally the people were hauled off on school buses from other parishes.

There are gangs of white vigilantes near here riding around in pickup trucks, all of them armed, and any young Black they see who they figure doesn't belong in their community, they shoot him. I tell them, "Stop! You're going to start a riot."

In the three days before the hurricane hit, we knew it was coming and everyone could have been evacuated. We have Amtrak here that could have carried everybody out of town. There were enough school buses that could have evacuated 20,000 people easily, but they just let them be flooded. My son watched 40 buses go underwater - they just wouldn't move them, afraid they'd be stolen.

There's military right here in New Orleans, but for three days they weren't even mobilized. You'd think this was a Third World country. I'm in the Algiers neighborhood of New Orleans, the only part that isn't flooded. The water is good. Our parks and schools could easily hold 40,000 people, and they're not using any of it.

This is criminal. These people are dying for no other reason than the lack of organization.

Malik Rahim is a veteran of the New Orleans Black Panther Party and an organizer of public-housing tenants.

WHY THEY ARE PIGS

In the worst days of the flooding, a SWAT team responded to a neighbors false complaint that "squatters" had taken over Leonard Thomas' house. Thomas at left, is in tears. The police wouldn't leave until he established proof of ownership. Government officials stopped providing food and water in an effort to force survivors to evacuate the city. PHOTO: AP



Katrina Survivor Stories In the First Person

THE STORM AFTER THE STORM

By NICHOLAS POWERS

God sent the Flood to punish us for our sins," said Reverend Willie Walker. I flinched and questioned him with my eyes as we sloshed through New Orleans. "For years we didn't challenge the system," he said. "We didn't demand that the levees be fixed. Political apathy is sin and we have been punished."

He hollered out that he was a pastor at Noah's Ark Missionary Church. I looked at the men and women sitting on the porches. They had been poor for a long time. Reverend Walker's castigation of them was the mirror image of the comment by Rep. Richard Baker of Baton Rouge who said, "We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did." When the words of the pastor and the politician are placed side by side a common desire is revealed, to excuse the destruction of those beyond the reach of God or Nation. Instead of asking how God or Nation failed the people, they assume the people failed the test of faith.

I walked toward a man, opening my bag of food. Before I got close, he waved me away. "I have enough water and food to stay alive," he said, "That's all I need to do right now, is stay alive."

The next day, the Reverend and I stood knee deep in dark water. A boat sped toward us. Inside it a rescue worker named Tim hovered over a gaunt 87-year-old man lying in a fetal position. A defibrillator wire coiled out of the man's chest, the blood on it still wet. Tim fanned the man's face with his hat. "Hang on, ya hear. We're gonna get you out." The man looked around with wet, scared eyes. "Can we get him to the shade, he's cooking." We pulled them under a tree and yelled for help.

"How long?" I asked. "Looks like days, man. We found him abandoned in an attic," Tim

said. "He's gonna be fine." It sounded more like a hope than a statement. A van drove up and we hoisted him in. After they left, I saw him in my mind, old, voiceless, begging through his eyes for help. I looked at the quiet city. Thousands of people were trapped in their homes. They had eaten all their food and drank all their water. They were dying now.

I climbed into a boat with Tim. We pushed off. Other reporters saw us and splashed through the water to get in. Cameras clicked. Notebooks held like poker cards. Downtown New Orleans was a lake. A boy waded through the streets with an air-conditioner on his shoulder. The cameras followed him, clicking. A man pushed a shopping cart through the dark water.

We sailed between buildings. Electric power lines drifted like a web in the water. Hoods of cars jutted like stones above the tide. The captain cut the engine and drifted up to a home where a family stood. "The federal cowboys are coming. We wanna get you out before they take you by force."

"Yeah, we gonna go," the mother said.

"Ma'am, why didn't you leave before?" a reporter asked.

"I wanted to protect our property, but material things ain't worth our



MILITARIZED STATE: The streets of New Orleans now resemble Baghdad. Thousands of soldiers, National Guard officers and mercenaries patrol the largely vacant city. Police have shot looters and threatened to beat journalists. PHOTOS: AP

lives. I wanna get my son outta here."

"Okay, we'll be back to pick you up. Tour's over, boys."

"Hold on. Hold on," they said, and adjusted the cameras.

"Please don't take pictures, I don't look decent," she said. They aimed the lens at her. She crossed her arms over herself.

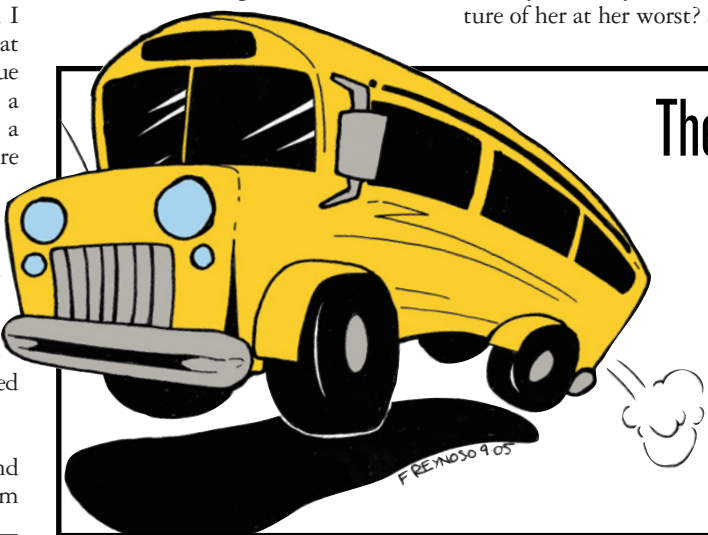
"Please."

The cameras clicked and clicked. Why did they need to get a picture of her at her worst? She asked to

be allowed her dignity, but dignity doesn't sell newspapers. Degradation does. It gives the readers proof of the distance between them and the poor. It gives the chance to pity someone who must be saved, and salvation has always been the last disguise of power. What the survivors need is not salvation but someone to share their burden. I learned this during the constant search for those trapped in buildings and those simply hiding out. On the last day of the boat mission, we got five men to abandon

The Hot Wheels Freedom Ride

With legions of poor people struggling to escape New Orleans, Jabbar Gibson, 18, took matters into his own hands. He stole an abandoned school bus, loaded about 100 people onto it, and drove them seven hours to the Astrodome. The group of mostly teenagers and young adults pooled what little money they had to buy diapers for the babies and fuel for the bus, according to the *Houston Chronicle*. When told that he might be prosecuted for "looting," Gibson was unmoved. "I don't care if I get blamed for it, as long as I saved my people." —JOHN TARLETON



The Right to Return: Going Home

By JORDAN FLAHERTY

NEW ORLEANS—I spent yesterday inside the city of New Orleans, speaking to a few of the last hold outs in the Ninth Ward/Bywater neighborhood. They paint a very different picture from what we've heard in the media. Instead of stories of gangs of criminals and police and soldiers keeping order, there were stories of collective action, everyone looking out for each other, communal responses.

During the first few nights, there was a large, free community barbecue at a neighborhood bar called The Country Club. People brought food and cooked and cooked and drank and went swimming (yes, there's a pool in the bar).

Emily Harris and Richie Kay traveled out on their boat bringing supplies and giving rides. They have been doing this almost every day since the hurricane struck. They estimate they have rescued at least a hundred people. Emily doesn't want to leave. She is a carpenter and builder, and says, "I want to stay and rebuild. I love New Orleans."

Emily describes a community that worked together in the first days after the hurricane. She also describes a scene of abandonment and disappointment. "A lot of people came to the high ground at St. Claude Avenue. They really thought someone would come and rescue them, and they waited all day for something—a boat, a helicopter, anything. There were helicopters in the sky, but none coming down."

"So people started walking as a mass uptown to Canal Street. Along the way, youths would break into grocery stores, take the food and distribute it evenly among houses in the community."

"Then they reached Canal Street, and saw that there was still no one that wanted to rescue them. That's when people broke into the stores on Canal Street."

Some neighborhoods remain underwater, and the water has turned into a sticky, stomach-turning sludge of sewage and death. Other neighborhoods are barely damaged at all, and if a large-scale effort were put into bringing back

electricity and clearing the streets of debris, people could begin to move back in now.

Activists from Get Your Act On are already moving back in to their homes. They have generators and supplies, and they are inviting anyone who is willing to fight for New Orleans to move back in with them. Malik Rahim, in New Orleans' West Bank, is refusing to leave and is inviting others to join him.

We want to rebuild our city that we love. The only way that New Orleans will be reconstructed as even a shadow of its former self is if the people of the city have direct control over that reconstruction. The People's Hurricane Fund (www.gccr.org) — made up of New Orleans community organizers and allies from around the U.S. — has already made a "right of return" for the displaced one of their first demands.

Jordan Flaherty is a union organizer and an editor of Left Turn Magazine.



Tens of thousands of African-American residents filled the Superdome and the New Orleans Convention Center after the government failed to help evacuate the city. Many were left for days without food, water or medical care in hellish conditions. 24 people who survived the hurricane died at the two sites.

their flooded homes. One of them, Danny Zilucca, sat with me on the boat as the truck towed it along the highway.

"Thank you for talkin' sense into me. Don't know why we held out so long," he said.

"Why didn't you go to the Superdome?"

"When you hear about all that craziness, why would you want to go there?" he said. "It seemed safer to stay. We got food and water to last." He kept looking around at the city, as if seeing it for the first time. The more he saw, the quieter he got.

"What's lost of New Orleans that may never come back?" I asked. Danny turned, wiped his face and closed his eyes.

"I'm sorry." He got up.

"It's okay, man."

"I'm sorry," he said again and walked to the end of the boat. He stood there weeping as we drove through the ruined city.

Danny returned and tried to say why he stayed in the abandoned city, but he would choke up and then for my sake, try again. I got for

the first time a sense of what had been lost. It was too immense to feel fully. Hundreds of thousands of people had left behind everything that gave their life meaning, their loves and home and friendships. It was a loss that preachers and politicians would try to fill with God and Nation. Faith in the future would replace the pain of the past. It would numb the loss without necessarily healing it, and as I sat on the boat listening to him I realized how numb I'd become to survive.

When I first came through Baton Rouge Airport, I half jogged through the terminal and ran past a small chapel room. Now I saw it again, and like the first time walked to the bar, the restaurant, the video-game room. I walked around in a

blind exhaustion, looked up and saw the chapel room again, and this time opened the door.

In the back was a dimly lit room with pews. I sat down and held my face in my hands. In my darkness I saw families walking through ruined streets, stunned and hungry. Women carried children too weak to walk. Men asked for help I could not give. In my darkness I saw the pain and desperation flooding their eyes.

When we looked at each other their desperation poured into me. I leaned over and pressed my palms over my eyes. My chest heaved. I tried to hold it back but against my will, against the dams built to keep me safe from experience, all the water I saw and waded through came streaming down my fingers.

The Renegade Boat Brigade

A Rescuer's Tale

By STEVEN WISHNIA

Yvonne Thibodeaux (not her real name) and her new husband returned from their honeymoon just in time to evacuate their New Orleans home, whose roof was torn off by the hurricane. They spent four days working on a rescue crew out of Lafayette, boating into their inundated hometown to pull people out of their flooded houses. A week later, the couple was hiding from an arrest warrant.

Thibodeaux, a New Orleans native who works as a freelance writer and bartender, says the federal and state supervision was criminally incompetent. "People are dying in my city because they can't decide who's in charge," she rages into the phone.

Her rescue crew would spend hours sitting at mysterious roadblocks when they were itching to head into the city.

"We got eleven people out in two hours," she says. "We should have been out there from morning till dusk."

One day, a flotilla of 90 boats was turned back from the city. Another day, they were diverted to ferrying workers to an oil refinery in Chalmette. In another incident, she adds, a FEMA crew ignored a woman lying unconscious on a freeway onramp. "She said she thought I was an angel," Thibodeaux recalls. "She started laughing when she saw I was a real woman, and she realized she was alive."

"Did you see the pictures of all the people on the Interstate?" she asks. "Did they show you the buses on the other side? It's not that hard to rescue 2,000 people when there are 200 buses on the other side."

Eventually, Thibodeaux says, rescuers started breaking the rules and going off on their own, dubbing themselves "The Renegade Boat Brigade."

On Sept. 5, Thibodeaux says, her grandparents—who she had presumed were dead—called on a neighbor's cell phone to say they were alive on a dry patch of land in the city's Lakeshore neighborhood. She told the crew. One unit, tired of waiting at a roadblock, went off on their own to try to rescue them. The neighbors came, but the grandparents refused to leave, Thibodeaux says.

Later in the day, she confronted her supervisor. "I told him, 'You have blood on your hands. People have died because of your ineptitude.'" She says he then told her, "We're not allowed to have refugees here. You'll have to go to a shelter." She then called a local CBS affiliate.

Her boss responded, she says, by getting the Department of Homeland Security to put out a warrant for her arrest, charging her with personal use of federal resources. "He's saying that I dispatched teams to get my family. And I didn't. I didn't," she says. "We spent our wedding money on a chainsaw to cut people out."

"Do they hate New Orleans because we voted Democratic?" she asks. "Do they want everyone in New Orleans to die because it's easier to let black people die than to rescue them?"

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'IT'S NOT ABOUT RACE' Of the thousands of refugees sent to Houston, 99 percent were black. Photo: AndrewStern.net

Hidden Heroics

What you will not see, but what we witnessed, were the real heroes and sheroes of the hurricane relief effort: the working class of New Orleans. The maintenance workers who used a forklift to carry the sick and disabled. The engineers, who rigged, nurtured and kept the generators running. The electricians who improvised thick extension cords stretching over blocks to share the little electricity we had in order to free cars stuck on rooftop parking lots. Nurses who took over for mechanical ventilators and spent hours manually forcing air into the lungs of unconscious patients to keep them alive. Doormen who rescued folks stuck in elevators. Refinery workers who broke into boat yards, "stealing" boats to rescue their neighbors clinging to their roofs in flood waters. Mechanics who helped hot-wire any car that could be found to ferry people out of the city. And the food-service workers who scoured the commercial kitchens improvising communal meals for hundreds of those stranded.

Most of these workers had lost their homes, and had not heard from members of their families, yet they stayed and provided the only infrastructure for the 20 percent of New Orleans that was not under water.

Bradshaw and Slonsky are paramedics from California who were attending an EMS conference in New Orleans.